United Nations A/63/PV.12

General Assembly

Official Records

Sixty-third session

12th plenary meeting
Friday, 26 September 2008, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann ..... (Nicaragua)

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

Address by Mr. Lawrence Gonzi, Prime Minister of the Republic of Malta

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Malta.

Mr. Lawrence Gonzi, Prime Minister of the Republic of Malta, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Lawrence Gonzi, Prime Minister of the Republic of Malta, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Gonzi (Malta): I would like to join other delegations in congratulating you, Sir, on your unanimous election to preside over the sixty-third session of the General Assembly. I am sure that with your experience and diplomatic skills you will chart a successful outcome of this session.

I also take this opportunity to express my appreciation to Mr. Kerim, President of the Assembly at its sixty-second session, for his leadership and dedication in guiding us diligently throughout his tenure.

Human security and the dignity of every man and woman require us to continue the discussion in order to build consensus on the principle of the responsibility to protect, particularly in relation to genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, as agreed by the 2005 World Summit. While we realize the sensitivity of the issue, Malta agrees with the Secretary-General that we need to move from declarations of commitment to practice and implementation.

Likewise, the fight against terrorism must remain high on our agenda. We should not lower our guard. We must always be vigilant and ready to take collective and practical action on a daunting, complex and politically sensitive issue. Terrorism has no boundaries, and the unspeakable acts of terrorism can strike anywhere, at any time, in poor and rich countries, with innocent victims paying for these vicious terror attacks, such as that perpetrated in Pakistan last week, attacks which undermine the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the individual and of society itself.

Malta, as a State party to the International Criminal Court, believes that the work carried out so far by the Court is commendable and merits our continued cooperation and commitment towards the maintenance of international peace and security.

Malta feels that the continuing recruitment and use of children in armed conflict and other grave offences against children merit our full condemnation. In this regard, we welcome the sustained activity of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict as well as the sterling work being carried out by the Secretary-General's Special

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Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Coomaraswamy.

The protection of the human being brings with it the responsibility to protect the environment. One of the issues which have been described as the defining challenge of our times, and also a matter described as the flagship issue of the debate at the sixty-second session, is climate change.

Next December we shall commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Assembly's adoption, on the proposal of Malta, of resolution 43/53, entitled "Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind", in paragraph 1 of which the Assembly recognized that "climate change is a common concern of mankind". Malta is proud that the seminal proposal launched in 1988 found universal support, which eventually led to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol.

The fact that the Assembly met earlier this year, after high-level panel discussions, for a thematic debate on "Addressing Climate Change: the United Nations and the World at Work" continues to give credibility and authority to the will of the overwhelming majority of States to respond urgently to climate change.

The process initiated at the Bali Conference last year established a clear road map with a view to agreeing on a new multilateral, comprehensive, coherent and effective post-2012 agreement, which we hope will be reached by 2009, in order to avoid any implementation gap.

Malta reiterates its conviction that we have a common obligation and responsibility to support ambitious and urgent action, at the national, regional and international levels, within the United Nations Framework Convention so as to stop and overturn in these coming years the accumulation of greenhouse gases, which are causing detrimental climate change. The vulnerability of small island States like my country to the negative impacts of climate change needs to be underlined.

For obvious reasons, Malta continues to direct its efforts towards making the Mediterranean a region of peace and cooperation.

We welcome and recognize the important developments on the Cyprus question; the renewed vigour in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations; the indirect negotiations between Israel and Syria, with Turkish mediation; the formation of a national unity Government in Lebanon; and the improved relations between Lebanon and Syria.

Since we met here last year important developments have taken place on the negotiations for a permanent settlement of the Palestinian question. The Annapolis Conference, held in November 2007, renewed hope when there was otherwise a bleak future with regard to the resolution of this question. Malta feels that all United Nations Member States, without exception, should continue to support the Secretary-General in his quest, together with the Quartet, to resolve the issue of Palestine refugees and that of the permanent status of Jerusalem, as well as the other important issues of settlements, borders, water and security.

The Paris International Donors Conference for the Palestinian State, the formal start of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and the series of meetings between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas have given a most welcome meaning to the efforts being made to resolve all outstanding issues, including all core issues without exception.

Malta's hosting of a United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine, held in June this year, followed shortly afterwards by the visit to Malta of President Mahmoud Abbas in July, came at an important — indeed, crucial — phase in the ongoing efforts to implement the Road Map and its commitments, as well as the obligations for a permanent two-State solution. We shall continue to lend our support to all initiatives that would bring everlasting peace to both the Israeli and Palestinian people.

We welcome all initiatives which create a bond between European and Mediterranean countries. A case in point is the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, with its headquarters in Malta, aiming to bring together all the littoral States of the Mediterranean on an equal footing to examine questions and take decisions on issues of direct interest to the countries in the region.

An important development in the Euro-Med partnership was the launching last July, on the initiative of President Sarkozy of France, of what is now known as the Union for the Mediterranean within

the Barcelona Process. Malta believes that this initiative will be a significant milestone in our common efforts to promote security and prosperity in the Euro-Mediterranean region, to the equal benefit of all European Union member States and Mediterranean partners. Malta looks forward to working constructively with other members of the Union to address some of the problems which the Mediterranean confronts, including in particular development, food security and the provision of water and energy.

While referring to these problems, I must highlight also the unprecedented increase in the influx of irregular immigrants that have been arriving in Malta mainly from the African continent. Malta is well aware of its responsibility in this area. However, as has been highlighted on numerous occasions, it is extremely difficult for us to continue to carry such a burden, which is so acutely disproportionate to the size of the country and its population.

It is for this reason that Malta has continuously requested assistance in tackling this problem through the principles of solidarity and sharing of responsibilities by Europe and other countries, as well as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Malta is grateful to those countries that have come forward to assist us in coping with this phenomenon. Nevertheless, much more needs to be done by us all, including the countries of origin and the countries of transit.

Africa continues to present us with a formidable challenge. It is a challenge not only for African countries themselves, but for the whole of the international community. While noting with satisfaction the success stories in the reduction of poverty, Malta remains very concerned that progress in Africa is still lagging behind. We have an obligation to enhance efforts to assist African countries to meet their legitimate goals of sustainable development.

It has been acknowledged that the Millennium Development Goals and the protection of human rights share a number of characteristics which require our constant attention. Recent phenomena, such as climate change, rising food prices and international financial instability, add further obstacles to the attainment of these Goals. Poverty eradication and the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals are to be priorities of our times which should be addressed in a multidimensional way, both through the conduct of political and economic decision-making and through social and environmental factors related to different facets, such as culture and gender equality, geography, climate and energy.

Malta strongly believes that the pledges made at the Millennium Summit in 2000 on the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals remain the overarching objective of our global agenda. Besides being a signatory to the Call to Action launched by Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Malta is also actively working to reach its targets for official development assistance set by the European Union.

The United Nations is passing through exciting but challenging times. Under the able leadership of the Secretary-General, the search for a reinvigorated Organization that will provide the whole membership with a sound basis to look to the future with vigour and determination has been endorsed and accepted by Member States.

During the sixty-second session, Member States continued to consider a series of critical issues in the process of reforming our Organization, including advancing a system-wide coherence, reviewing all mandates originating from resolutions of the General Assembly, management practices, the revitalization of the General Assembly, and giving the Security Council a more equitable representation.

We all recognize that the transformation of the United Nations into a stronger Organization requires from all of us determination and conviction that only a concerted effort by all Member States can achieve. The reform of the United Nations is an evolving exercise which requires on our part not only understanding, but also solidarity and partnership which we as Member States must engage to overcome the new and emerging challenges facing humankind.

In a few weeks, Member States will be celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Sixty years have passed since that historic day in 1948, six decades which have witnessed great political, economic and social upheavals in the lives of our peoples. Throughout these years, this family of nations has also increased fourfold, an increase bringing with it a diverse community, large and small countries, rich and poor, but with the sole aim of upholding the fundamental premise of the Universal Declaration that

"all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights".

This anniversary on 10 December 2008 will provide us with the opportunity to rededicate ourselves to the pledges and commitments we made when we became Members of this Organization. It is a recommitment which as Prime Minister of Malta, and on behalf of the Maltese people, I solemnly make today.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Malta for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Lawrence Gonzi, Prime Minister of the Republic of Malta, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Derrick Sikua, Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands.

Mr. Derrick Sikua, Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Derrick Sikua, Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Sikua (Solomon Islands): At the outset, Sir, allow me to offer the warm and sincere congratulations of Solomon Islands on your election as President of the Assembly at its sixty-third session. I am confident that with your vast experience and able leadership you will guide this session to a fruitful outcome. You can rest assured of Solomon Islands unwavering support and cooperation during your tenure of office.

Through you, I acknowledge the good work of your predecessor, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, who has shown great leadership on issues of global concern, in particular on climate change, financing for development, United Nations reform and the Millennium Development Goals.

My delegation is pleased to see you, Mr. President, take such issues head on, presiding over the high-level event on the Millennium Development Goals as we arrive at the midpoint of our time-bound commitments. Unfortunately, many countries, including my own, are off track in terms of achieving the Goals.

My delegation also wishes to join others in conveying its gratitude and appreciation to our Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, who has worked tirelessly and diligently to protect and preserve the principles and purposes of the Charter during his first year in office. We wish him well as he carries on the good work he has begun — in particular, his regular briefings of the membership, making his office accountable and transparent in carrying out its activities.

This year our multilateral institution is being revisited by history and challenged by the changing international system. Unilateralism and changing postures by big Powers are creating a new global order. The creation of new fronts in Asia, the Pacific and Eastern Europe is coupled with the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and parts of Africa. Above all, the arms race is no longer a threat, but a reality.

The structural imbalances of the international financial architecture have exposed the inability of the major developed markets to respond to the volatility of the international financial system, resulting in State interventions. The world economy is looking more precarious and unequal. For small open economies the results are catastrophic. Hence, we must be cautious in using the free market approach and recognize its limitations.

The increasing cost of food and energy is causing macroeconomic instability throughout the world today. This speaks of the complexity and weakness of the international system. It reflects the uneven distribution of wealth that continues to fail the developing countries, generating instability across the world. This can only be corrected by having an open rule-based, non-discriminatory and equitable trading system.

Furthermore, market speculation and agricultural subsidies continue to pose major risks to the global economy. The failure of the recent Doha Round is of concern to my delegation, as it further marginalizes the small economies from globalization. The issue of the food crisis now deserves our immediate and most serious consideration at this session.

My delegation deeply regrets that the recently discussed United Nations food crisis Comprehensive Action Plan is not matched by the required resources.

Countries will therefore need to look at their own resources for solutions. To this end, Solomon Islands is working on short-, medium- and long-term solutions. The population is encouraged to eat locally produced food and to undertake community-based rice growing programmes. Solomon Islands hopes to further strengthen its relations with rice-growing countries. My Government commends the Republic of China on Taiwan for supporting Solomon Islands rice-growing programmes.

Dependency on imported fossil fuel and food is reversing Millennium Development Goals gains, painstakingly achieved over the last decades. Solomon Islands is no exception. Thus, cleaner energy to power the world economy is the way forward. In this connection, we look to both the North and the South for solutions. I wish to thank the Republic of China on Taiwan, Turkey, Italy and Austria for coming forward with community-based renewable energy programmes. Such cooperation preserves the indispensable character of our noble institution and translates into action the Solomon Islands rural electrification policy of bringing affordable electricity to 80 per cent of its population in the rural areas.

We are also exploring bulk purchasing arrangements with Venezuela, using the models of the Petro Carribe arrangement. We hope, having spent a third of our national budget on fuel alone, that this will provide Solomon Islands with some breathing space.

Climate change and natural disasters continue to create anxiety and cast a dark cloud over the future and survival of humanity, in particular of the 50 million people of small island developing States. The magnitude of climate change has outgrown the existing capacity of the United Nations system. Our multilateral institution is heavy on providing technical support and analytical data and less weighty with regard to on-the-ground activities. Regional and subregional intergovernmental organizations are also going in the same direction, leaving countries to fend for themselves. Solomon Islands hopes that the Small Island Developing States Unit within the United Nations will be strengthened to effectively coordinate implementation of meeting the special needs of small island developing States.

Today there is already within Solomon Islands a steady migratory pattern of movements of indigenous populations from their ancestral low islands to larger islands as sea levels rise. This has placed much stress on the diverse fragile land tenure system, causing friction between ethnic groups. Climate change is for Solomon Islands a sustainable development, security and poverty issue — all are interlinked. It is about preserving our forests, about our reforestation programme and about providing environment-friendly opportunities for the resources owners in our rural areas.

On this note, Solomon Islands is embarking on an ambitious programme of scaling down logging, which is the country's major export income-earner. My Government has earmarked funds for community-based reafforestation and reforestation programmes. It is hoped that over time the agriculture, tourism and fisheries industries will fill the forestry vacuum within the country's economy, and that sustainable harvest of forests will become the norm.

The increased frequency and magnitude of natural disasters remind us that no country will be spared. Solomon Islands is still recovering from last year's tsunami. We feel the pain and suffering of the Governments and peoples of Myanmar and the People's Republic of China, hit by Cyclone Nargis and earthquake respectively.

More recently the three hurricanes that battered our fellow islanders in the Caribbean speak of our common vulnerability to natural disasters.

My delegation hopes that a more committed outcome will emerge from the Bali Action Plan.

Solomon Islands further notes with concern the proliferation of climate change financial mechanisms outside the multilateral process. This will once again disadvantage the most vulnerable countries — small island developing States and least developed countries. Climate change for us requires new and additional resources. Accessibility to the Adaptation Fund and funds for mitigation and technology transfer are at the heart of the solutions to climate change challenges.

In this light, Solomon Islands fully associates itself with the Alliance of Small Island States Declaration on the issue, as well as the recently adopted Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Niue Declaration on Climate Change. We further call on the United Nations membership to support the draft resolution on climate change and security.

On the issue of terrorism, Solomon Islands is concerned about the lack of progress on the draft comprehensive terrorism convention. The absence of a legal definition of terrorism is creating gaps in our global fight against terror. We continue to condemn terrorism in whatever form and manifestation. We urge the international community to weed out the evils that breed terrorism. Our fight against terrorism must be responsible and humane.

I take this opportunity to sincerely congratulate the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, commonly referred to as RAMSI. The Government and people of Solomon Islands value its partnership with the Regional Mission, and I thank all participating Pacific Islands Forum Countries for their ongoing contribution and commitment. RAMSI continues to enjoy popular support, as it provides a unique opportunity and an enabling environment to rebuild Solomon Islands. Since assuming office nine months ago, my Government, the Coalition for National Unity and Rural Advancement, has defined its relationship with RAMSI and the Pacific Islands Forum through consultation and dialogue. This is done through regional and national processes.

Solomon Islands and RAMSI will soon commence negotiations on a proposed Government-RAMSI partnership framework, which will form the basis of future cooperation. The guiding principles of the framework are that it should be people-centred, nationally owned and driven and aligned to Government priorities and policies. This should guarantee its sustainability and long-term success.

Meanwhile, our Parliamentary Foreign Relations Committee has been mandated by our National Parliament to review RAMSI. The Committee is expected to report its findings to Parliament next year.

Solomon Islands is establishing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, modelled on South Africa's experience, to address people's traumatic experience during the three years of ethnic conflict. It is our hope that the process will rebuild confidence, trust and unity among the diverse cultural communities in Solomon Islands.

More than 80 per cent of the country's resources and land are traditionally owned. Last month the Solomon Islands National Parliament passed a Secured Transactions Bill, which will make traditional assets bankable to allow more investment in the informal sector. Solomon Islands is also considering putting in place a Political Parties Integrity Bill to instil national stability and nurture its growing democracy.

On the issue of achieving the Millennium Development Goals, as a small island developing State with least developed country status, we find that much of our achievement rests on partnership with all stakeholders at all levels. Solomon Islands is one of the highest foreign aid recipient countries. This unfortunately has overstretched and crowded our national policy space in strengthening and maintaining good relations with all donors. Meanwhile, the Government welcomes new approaches by non-traditional donors of providing direct assistance using existing national institutional frameworks. This strengthens governance and democracy, as provided for under the Paris Declaration, allowing the State to increase its legitimacy and reach out to its population more meaningfully.

My delegation remains concerned that much of the debate on the Millennium Development Goals is centred on social commitments, from health to gender and from HIV/AIDS to education. Economic issues are given no attention, placing countries with huge youth and unemployed populations in an awkward and fragile situation. We consider such a gap as a time bomb that will explode and trigger more instability in the future if it remains unaddressed.

Educating our youth is the way forward. We are therefore grateful to those countries that continue to train our young people. This year a new partner, Cuba, is offering medical training opportunities for more than 60 students. Solomon Islands will make every effort to utilize these training opportunities.

Within my subregion of the Pacific, the Melanesian Spearhead Group, after some 20 years of informal existence, has established a secretariat, located in Vanuatu. This should further strengthen relations among the subregion's countries and its wider neighbours, as we continue to address our collective development aspirations.

We have only eight months left to register our continental shelf, as required by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. We are working diligently on the matter, having just accessed the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea Trust Fund four months ago. Solomon Islands welcomes the recent decision by the eighteenth

Meeting of States Parties to the Convention recognizing the technical and resources constraints on many developing countries in meeting the required time frame of May 2009. We are determined to keep working on this very important issue, which will redefine our territorial waters.

I turn to sustainable development issues. Hailing from the world's largest ocean, countries of the Pacific have relied on the ocean for their livelihood and economic sustenance. This has prompted certain countries of the Pacific, including Solomon Islands, to initiate sustainable management arrangements to protect our juvenile tuna stocks by closing pockets of high seas adjacent to our respective exclusive economic zones.

The review of the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus scheduled for late this year should promote global growth and better international development support, especially for the least developed countries which remain on the periphery of the international system. Solomon Islands hopes the review will also reinvigorate the operations and governance of the Bretton Woods institutions, to make them more responsive to the changing character of the international financial system and become an effective part of the multilateral system.

As one of the least developed countries, Solomon Islands looks forward to the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, scheduled for 2010, which will provide an opportunity to address the special challenges of the least developed countries. My delegation joins other least developed countries in looking to you, Mr. President, for leadership to work on the modalities of the conference during this session.

On the issue of democratization of the United Nations, Solomon Islands believes that our Organization must play a prominent role in influencing and shaping the dynamics of the international system. This can be achieved only by increasing the legitimacy of our premier Organization through wider participation of its membership. This means that strengthening the General Assembly is crucial. Ensuring that the Secretariat is representative of the membership is a must.

We also call for a genuine attempt by the Secretariat to undertake a universal recruitment drive, in particular among those that remain underrepresented in the Organization. This could be achieved through annual country competitive recruitment exams. Solomon Islands welcomes the recent recruitment exams held in Honiara, and would like to see them held annually.

On the issue of system-wide coherence, Solomon Islands notes the establishment five months ago of the joint office arrangement between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Having one of the largest UNDP country programmes in the subregion of the Pacific, we note with concern that more than 70 per cent to 80 per cent of the programmes are spent on consultancy, making country-United Nations relations distant.

In this regard, my delegation welcomes the appointment of an in-country UNDP Deputy Resident Representative. However, we renew our call for a fully fledged in-country Resident Representative.

Security Council reform continues to elude the Organization. It is like a process that has never started and takes the longest to finish. We have over the years identified elements for negotiations, yet remain reluctant to move into intergovernmental negotiations. I am confident that you will give us leadership, Mr. President, and plough deep in facilitating an intergovernmental process on Security Council reform by February 2009. In this connection, Solomon Islands reiterates its support for Japan, Brazil and India as permanent members in an enlarged Security Council.

On the issue of Taiwan, Solomon Islands congratulates the Government and people of Taiwan on the successful free and fair election of President Ma Ying-jeou in March this year. My delegation acknowledges the goodwill shown by Taiwan in developing an atmosphere of trust, flexibility, pragmatism and a positive spirit to reduce tension across the Taiwan Strait with greater economic engagement through trade, tourism and cultural exchange.

We also note the intention to replace armed confrontation with negotiation, and isolation with engagement. Resumption of direct flights between the two countries, increased dialogue, and people-to-people interaction are all positive developments that should be encouraged. Above all, much has happened since the March election.

Solomon Islands calls on the international community to recognize the Republic of China on Taiwan's good faith and build on the positive momentum. The international community must provide the Republic of China on Taiwan with the necessary and appropriate international space if we are to be responsible and contribute to the maintenance of international peace, stability and security along the Taiwan Strait.

Solomon Islands welcomes the 47-day Annapolis talks held from December 2007 into January this year. My delegation shares the Quartet's support for ongoing Palestine and Israel negotiations to realize the shared goal of establishing a Palestine State by December 2008 as a just, permanent and long-lasting solution to the Middle East conflict.

Solomon Islands further salutes Turkey for mediating talks between Israel and Syria in April, and salutes the courage of the two countries in discussing issues that are difficult and sensitive.

In conclusion, as we reflect on the range of the global agenda before us, we must honour and act on our collective commitments. We must also define a path that offers our people human security guaranteeing freedom from want, freedom from fear and freedom to live in human dignity.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Derrick Sikua, Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of the Republic of India

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of India.

Mr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of the Republic of India, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of the Republic of India, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Singh (India): May I first congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the Assembly at its sixty-third session. I am [illegible] vast experience will guide [illegible] challenges that the world [illegible]

The United Nations [illegible] faith in the benefits o[illegible] multilateral approaches i[illegible] the 2005 World Summit [illegible] agenda for early and mea[illegible] Nations. However, we mu[illegible] there has been little prog[illegible] the reform agenda.

We need to make [illegible] revitalize the General Ass[illegible] rightful role as the princi[illegible] United Nations system. [illegible] Security Council need[illegible] contemporary realities of t[illegible] a truly representative and[illegible] can become the effect[illegible] cooperative efforts of the [illegible] to expeditiously hold nego[illegible]

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The world food crisis is the cumulative consequence of the neglect of agriculture in the developing world, exacerbated by distortionary agricultural subsidies in the developed world. Diversion of cultivable land for producing biofuels is compounding the problem.

The world needs a second green revolution to address the problem of food security. We need new technologies, new institutional responses and above all a global compact to ensure food and livelihood security. This will require transfer of technology and innovation from developed to developing countries. India is very keen to expand cooperation with Africa in Africa's quest for food and livelihood security for its people.

Trade liberalization in agriculture can help, provided it adequately takes into account the livelihood concerns of poor and vulnerable farmers in the developing and least developed countries.

It is feared that many of the conflicts of the twenty-first century will be over water. We must therefore collect as never before to use this scarce resource more efficiently. We need to invest in new technologies and new production regimes for rain-fed and dryland agriculture and explore cost-effective desalination technologies.

Poverty, ignorance and disease still afflict millions and millions of people. The commitment to achieve the ambitious targets set as part of the Millennium Development Goals was an acknowledgement by the international community that global prosperity and welfare are indivisible and that affluence cannot coexist with pervasive poverty.

Unfortunately, solemn commitments made for the transfer of financial resources from the developed to the developing world have remained largely unfulfilled. The commitment of developed countries to move to the target set long ago of 0.7 per cent of gross national income as official development assistance needs to be honoured as a matter of priority. In this context, special efforts have to be made to address the concerns of Africa for adequate resource flows to support its development.

Poverty, ignorance and livelihood security are closely linked to energy access. We need a multi-pronged response to sustainably and reliably meet the energy needs of poor countries and poor masses. We need a basket of options and means, such as carbon trading mechanisms, to help countries cope with oil shocks.

We must put in place a global cooperative network of institutions of developed and developing countries engaged in research and development in energy efficiency, clean energy technologies, and renewable sources of energy.

India is registering rapid economic growth, and has combined it with declining energy intensity of its economy. However, our total demand will keep increasing, and we are actively looking for all possible sources of clean energy.

The opening of international civil nuclear cooperation with India will have a positive impact on global energy security and on the efforts to combat climate change. This is a vindication of India's impeccable record on non-proliferation and testifies to our long-standing commitment to nuclear disarmament that is global, universal and non-discriminatory in nature. The blueprint for this was spelled out by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in this very Assembly 20 years ago.

I reiterate India's proposal for a nuclear weapons convention prohibiting the development, production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons and providing for their complete elimination within a specified time frame.

Climate change can be overcome successfully only through a collaborative and cooperative global effort.

We support the multilateral negotiations now taking place under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The outcome must be fair and equitable and recognize the principle that each citizen of the world has equal entitlement to the global atmospheric space.

I believe that the pursuit of ecologically sustainable development need not be in contradiction to achieving our growth objectives. As Mahatma Gandhi once said, "The earth has enough resources to meet people's needs, but will never have enough to satisfy people's greed."

The growing assertion of separate identities and ethnic, cultural and religious intolerance threaten our developmental efforts and our peace and stability. It is vital that we strengthen international cooperation to combat terrorism and to bring the perpetrators, organizers, financers and sponsors of terrorism to justice. We should conclude expeditiously the draft comprehensive convention on international terrorism.

In this context, the situation in Afghanistan is a matter of deep concern. The international community must pool all its resources to ensure the success of Afghanistan's reconstruction efforts and its emergence as a moderate, pluralistic and democratic society.

We welcome the return of democracy in Pakistan. We are committed to resolving all outstanding issues between India and Pakistan, including the issue of Jammu and Kashmir, through peaceful dialogue.

We also welcome the coming to power of democratically elected Governments in Nepal and Bhutan. We seek to expand areas of cooperation with all these countries to deal with the challenges of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

The United Nations is a living symbol of pluralism. It has weathered many storms. It is the vehicle through which our combined will and efforts to address global challenges must be articulated and implemented. Unless we rise to the task, we will bequeath to succeeding generations a world of diminishing prospects.

The President *(spoke in Spanish)*: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of India for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of the Republic of India, was escorted from the rostrum.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia.

Mr. Ivo Sanader, Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Ivo Sanader, Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Sanader (Croatia): I would like first to congratulate Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann on his assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session, as well as to thank Mr. Srgjan Kerim for the excellent work he did during his presidency of the General Assembly in the preceding year.

As we gather here once again to address the most significant issues on the global agenda, the General Assembly opening session reminds us of our shared vision of the United Nations as the embodiment of a family of nations.

It reminds us of the constant need for an effective multilateral effort to address global challenges, and to maintain and build peace in a range of conflict zones and post-conflict societies, searching for solutions within the rule-based international order, through the promotion of freedom, democracy, development and respect for human rights.

It also gives us the opportunity to take stock of our achievements, as well as to redouble our commitment to world peace and progress.

This is a commitment that Croatia and its people accepted even before our independence: a commitment to strengthen international cooperation through effective multilateral organizations for advancing peace and security, facilitating development and combating poverty, protecting our environment, eradicating diseases and promoting public health.

As a renewal of that commitment, we celebrate this year the 120th anniversary of the birth of the famous Croat, Dr. Andrija Štampar, a founding father of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the first President of the WHO Assembly. In his inaugural speech in 1948, Dr. Štampar clearly stated that the

[illegible] understanding among nations.

Dr. Stjepan [illegible] for the broader family of United Nations institutions. His work is a testimony to the lasting commitment of Croatia and its people to the promotion of peace through international cooperation.

Since our independence, Croatia's leaders have come every year before this Assembly to renew this solemn commitment. Even in the most difficult of times, when our own existence was in peril and collective security guarantees vanished, we still came to New York to express Croatia's adherence to the values enshrined in the Charter.

Croatia has come a long way since those testing days of struggle. Yet our determination in pursuing the Charter principles has remained intact.

We have developed a stable democracy and a growing economy, but we have not forgotten those brave men and women who struggled for and achieved our independence, as well as those men and women of goodwill who, under the flag of the United Nations, assisted us in our time of need.

With that conviction and determination, with the sincere sense of debt and a genuine vocation for cooperation, I come today before the Assembly to share with it Croatia's views on the most pressing and relevant issues for our international community.

On this occasion, though, Croatia is for the first time in a position to address these issues from a different angle — that of an elected member of the Security Council. Membership of the Security Council is not only a great honour for Croatia, but also a great responsibility we have been preparing for in recent years.

(spoke in French)

Over the past decade, Croatia has completed a transformative journey that may without exaggeration be described as impressive. Since the war-torn early 1990s it has emerged as an anchor of stability, security and cooperation in South-East Europe.

Croatia is today at the doorstep of the European Union. We are determined to conclude the accession negotiations in 2009, thus completing a demanding process of profound political, economic and social reforms.

[illegible] the European [illegible] guide us in the [illegible] and we [illegible] Union.

(spoke in English)

We attach equal importance to our membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and we look forward to the celebration of our accession to the alliance at the next summit in spring 2009, which will also mark NATO's sixtieth anniversary.

Through reforms, we have successfully turned our country from a consumer to a net contributor to international peace and security. Today, Croatian forces are engaged in 13 United Nations peacekeeping operations in four different continents. Our men and women in uniform also serve in the NATO-led operation in Afghanistan and the European Union operation in Chad, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

In all these conflict areas, our service men and women have proved their dedication and professionalism. However, probably their most valuable contribution is their ability to share with the local population Croatia's own experience in overcoming the consequences of war and taking the road of reconciliation, cooperation and development.

As a member of the Security Council, Croatia will continue to work as a responsible and dedicated partner in the common effort to maintain and build peace through the promotion of human rights and democracy, the fight for the eradication of poverty and injustice, and the advancement of effective multilateralism.

In this Croatia will be guided by a sense of responsibility, solidarity and good faith. We hold that effective multilateral action, including with regional organizations, is our best guarantee in safeguarding these values.

While we see progress in advancing these values in some troubled areas of our world, such as Afghanistan, Iraq and the Middle East, we have also witnessed other conflicts arising, such as in Georgia.

In this respect, we welcome the six-point agreement brokered by the European Union presidency and President Sarkozy in August, as well as the implementing agreement from September.

We are also aware that the failure to address these issues in a multilateral context of cooperation could lead us into old paradigms of confrontation. At the same time, the lack of audacity to confront them could endanger the democratic gains obtained with the end of the cold war. These gains should be preserved, as they themselves derive from the fundamental principles emanating from the Charter.

We should not forget that the United Nations stands for the common fundamental values of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance and respect for human rights. In this regard, the suffering of the people of the Sudan, particularly in Darfur, and the suffering of the people in Somalia and Myanmar are also stark reminders of the gap between the goals this Organization has set and the realities on the ground.

My country welcomes joint international efforts to address the question of flagrant violations of international humanitarian law and human rights through established international mechanisms and institutions like the International Criminal Court (ICC). The ICC provides a vital recourse to justice in situations where national Governments cannot or will not address these issues themselves.

Human rights and the rule of law are essential building blocks for a more peaceful, just and prosperous world. This year we are marking the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As a member of the Security Council, my country is dedicated to advancing these rights to those most vulnerable in conflict: civilians, notably women and children.

We are pleased that this year the Council adopted a strong and action-oriented resolution addressing the disturbing practice of sexual violence as a method of warfare.

We also continue to work on advancing the cause of preventing children becoming part of armed conflicts, believing that the realities on the ground require stronger Council involvement. For this and many other reasons, Croatia has decided to present its candidature for membership in the Human Rights Council for the period 2010-2013.

We live in a world that has significantly redefined the traditional notion of threats to international peace and security. In an increasingly interconnected world, global threats are taking many forms.

Terrorism, poverty, disease, climate change, environmental degradation and rising food prices command that we work together, as only a common vision and collective action, implemented in the spirit of solidarity and responsibility, can counter these challenges.

Terrorism attempts to undermine the core values of the modern world and poses a serious challenge to our security, the basic principles of democratic societies and the rights and freedoms of our citizens. Terrorist acts are criminal in nature and cannot be justified under any circumstances. Croatia appreciates and fully supports all efforts in the global struggle against terrorism, within the United Nations system and beyond.

Since the beginning of this year, my country has been chairing the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee, which was established in the immediate aftermath of the devastating terrorist attacks against the United States and the whole democratic world on 11 September 2001. We have assumed this responsibility with the utmost seriousness and are working towards moving the Committee forward by focusing on concrete results and achieving realistic objectives.

I would also like to reiterate the importance Croatia attaches to the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy as one of the primary international documents in the global fight against terrorism. Croatia is also active on the regional level, presiding over the Committee of Experts on Terrorism (CODEXTER) within the Council of Europe.

In overcoming global threats and challenges, initiatives such as the Alliance of Civilizations can also act as a stimulus, augmenting mutual respect, understanding and cooperation among States and peoples across cultures and religions. As the Alliance's main goal is to counter intolerance, religious fundamentalism and extremism, Croatia is pleased to be a part of this ever-growing group.

Our dialogue and cooperation should also be directed with more emphasis at combating poverty and establishing a global partnership for development. In this regard, my country welcomes the Secretary-General's leadership in calling for action to make progress for the poorest of the poor, the so-called bottom billion.

We also believe that it is essential for Governments to support the delivery of commitments made, with the aim of getting the Millennium Development Goals back on track. Specific arrangements between donor and recipient countries on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals should be put into action through a human-centred approach to the key themes of the Goals, or more precisely health and education, the environment and the eradication of poverty.

In this sense, we recognize the importance of mobilizing financial resources for development, as well as their effective use in developing countries. The Monterrey Consensus remains the foundation of the global partnership for development, and Croatia believes in a positive outcome of the review conference to take place in Doha later this year. In this context, Croatia will honour the obligations and figures established pursuant to its status as a candidate for membership in the European Union.

Through its transition process Croatia has emerged from being a recipient country to being a country whose own experience and resources have enabled it to become an international donor. As a contributor to various United Nations funds and programmes, Croatia has confirmed its capability to support the activities of the United Nations in numerous fields, and will continue to do so through sharing our experiences and assisting those in need.

However, while Croatia increases its contribution to global progress and takes a more assertive role in the international arena, it also remains active in, and committed to, fostering stability in South-East Europe. Our membership in the Security Council and our advanced phase of integration in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union has not led us to turn our back on our neighbours. On the contrary, it has enabled us to redouble our efforts in preserving stability and maximizing the benefits of peace.

Through initiatives such as the establishment of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), headquartered in Sarajevo and with a top Croatian diplomat, Mr. Hido Biscevic, as its first Secretary General, we have actively contributed to regional stability.

However, there is still unfinished business in our neighbouring region. Let me mention one example: Bosnia and Herzegovina. The foundations for stability in that country reside in respect for equal rights for all three constituent and sovereign people: Croats, Bosniaks and Serbs.

The Republic of Croatia stands ready, along with the international community, to support and assist Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as all the other countries in the region, through an active policy of cooperation.

Such cooperation paves the way for long-standing security and prosperity in South-East Europe. And in that way Croatia will continue to back the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of all its neighbours. In that way my country will renew its determination to foster peace, democracy and tolerance, thus honouring our commitment to the Charter.

Last April, in this very Hall, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI reminded us that:

> "The founding principles of the Organization — the desire for peace, the quest for justice, respect for the dignity of the person, humanitarian cooperation and assistance — express the just aspirations of the human spirit and constitute the ideals which should underpin international relations." (*A/62/PV.95, p. 3*)

We should always remember these ideals as we continue to work together on exploiting the full potential of the United Nations in creating a more peaceful, prosperous and democratic world.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Ivo Sanader, Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Apisai Ielemia, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Labour of Tuvalu

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Labour of Tuvalu.

Mr. Apisai Ielemia, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Labour of Tuvalu, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Apisai Ielemia, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Labour of Tuvalu, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Ielemia (Tuvalu): Standing before the Assembly for the first time, I am greatly honoured by this opportunity to speak on behalf of the people and Government of Tuvalu.

Next week, on 1 October, Tuvalu will commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of its independence. While we take pride in moving forward in nationhood, as a small and young nation, we have full confidence in the noble goals of the United Nations to guide us through the waters of our destiny. Our presence here in the United Nations is our statement of hope and trust in the goodwill of humanity.

Let me on this occasion express Tuvalu's deep appreciation to all members of the international community for their invaluable support to my nation, and convey its warmest greetings and felicitations to the Assembly at its sixty-third session.

I wish also to associate us with previous speakers in extending our congratulations to the President on his election and in expressing our appreciation to his predecessor, particularly for promoting the issue of climate change, among other matters, within the Assembly's agenda.

Climate change is without doubt the most serious threat to the global security and survival of mankind. It is an issue of enormous concern to a highly vulnerable small island State like Tuvalu. Here in this great house we now know both the science and economics of climate change. We also know the cause of climate change, and that human actions by all countries are urgently needed to address it.

The central message to us, world leaders, of both the International Panel on Climate Change reports and the Sir Nicholas Stern report on climate change is crystal clear: unless urgent actions are taken to curb greenhouse gas emissions by shifting to a new global energy mix based on renewable energy sources, and unless there is timely adaptation, the adverse impacts of climate change on all communities will be catastrophic.

This great family, the United Nations, must not fail to take heed of these timely warnings, and to save us all, particularly the small and most vulnerable, from this man-made catastrophe.

The next 12 to 18 months are crucial in the context of negotiating a new international agreement on climate change, based on the Bali Action Plan. We must work together to ensure that all countries make a substantial effort to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

We need to find the right incentives to ensure that all countries contribute to dramatically reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This requires a substantial collective effort. It also requires strong political leadership. Tuvalu observes with great disappointment the clear absence of this leadership particularly emerging from the recently concluded Group of Eight (G-8) Summit. We need stringent, short-term targets by all major developed countries.

Based on the principle of the polluter pays and common but differentiated responsibilities, the industrialized world must show strong leadership in advancing real actions on climate change. But all countries must also act. In the little way we can, we in the small island developing States are also committed to contributing to emission reduction through use of renewable energy.

While we call for urgent action to reduce emissions, we know that the impacts of climate change are upon us. For a highly vulnerable small coral atoll nation like Tuvalu, the consequences of the impacts of climate change are frightening. The survival and security of our entire nation, along with fundamental human rights and its cultural identity, are under threat; Tuvalu is right on the edge of existence. Climate change could well push us over that edge.

Last year Tuvalu produced an international blueprint on adaptation which we presented as a submission to the Conference of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This blueprint highlights a number of areas where we envisage greater collaboration within the United Nations system. Let me highlight a few.

First, it is very clear that financial resources for adaptation are completely inadequate. Last year Oxfam International suggested that the adaptation needs of developing countries will cost a minimum of $50 billion per year. We must work together to find these additional funds. One means of increasing the

funding for adaptation is through the creation of what we call a burden-sharing mechanism. Funding for this mechanism could come from levies on the share of the proceeds from emissions trading and international aviation and maritime transport.

We also believe that new and additional sources of funding must be identified and channelled through the recently established Adaptation Fund to help fund concrete adaptation projects in-country to adapt to the impacts of climate change, while ensuring long-term survival and livelihoods of our God-given lands. While we welcome, therefore, the recent launch of several new funding initiatives on climate change, we must caution against the fragmentation of international efforts, and warn of the need, not to do more studies, but to fulfil obligations to urgently save those suffering from climate change.

Secondly, we need collaborative action by United Nations institutions and non-governmental organizations to develop a comprehensive approach to long-term adaptation action. As a first step, we believe, a special coordination committee should be established under the auspices of the General Assembly.

Thirdly, the blueprint proposes the establishment of an international climate insurance pool. This would be an internationally sourced pool of funds for an insurance mechanism to provide support to the most vulnerable communities to meet the costs of rebuilding after climate-related disasters.

Those are only three ideas we have elaborated in our blueprint. There are a number of others. We encourage the President to look closely at the blueprint and develop the ideas further.

We strongly believe that it is the political and moral responsibility of the world, particularly those who caused the problem, to save small islands and countries like Tuvalu from climate change and ensure that we continue to live in our home islands with long-term security, cultural identity and fundamental human dignity. Forcing us to leave our islands due to the inaction of those responsible is immoral, and cannot be used as a quick-fix solution to the problem.

In the context of all this, therefore, Tuvalu also strongly supports the draft resolution on security and climate change submitted by the Pacific small island developing States, to be reintroduced at this sixty-third session. We urge others to co-sponsor this very important draft resolution and properly address the issues raised in it.

Tuvalu recently attended the High-Level Conference on World Food Security. We share the grave concerns regarding the current global issue of high food prices, food shortages and their associated social problems for humanity, which are made worse by high fuel prices. We highly commend the initiative taken by the Secretary-General in establishing the High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis, and the formulation of a Comprehensive Framework for Action. We sincerely hope that this Framework will produce concrete results in countries experiencing the food crisis.

One of the most sensitive issues for small and vulnerable island developing States like Tuvalu has been the lack of recognition of our unique vulnerability in the consideration of the question of graduation from the least developed country (LDC) status. Our economic and environmental vulnerabilities cannot be ignored. The enormous threat of more severe weather events and a rising sea level hangs overhead like a large storm cloud. It hinders investment in our country and potentially puts into question our very survival. We therefore make a strong and heartfelt appeal to the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and our development partners to carefully reconsider the criteria for LDC graduation.

Two issues are of particular concern. First, it is remarkable that nearly all recent graduates and potential graduates are small islands — including my own country, Tuvalu. The small island States that are also LDCs eligible for graduation all have improved their per capita income and their human assets. Also, they have in common the fact that they are highly vulnerable in economic and environmental terms. But this vital criterion of vulnerability does not seem to be taken seriously enough. In short, our countries are or could be losing LDC status because of progress they have made on per capita income, despite the fact that the sustainability of that income is challenged by our vulnerability.

My second point has to do with the serious lack of coherence within the United Nations system. For several years the high level of vulnerability of small island developing States has been recognized and reiterated in many different United Nations circles — in Rio, Barbados, Mauritius and Johannesburg, as well

as in several other major United Nations events, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Summit Declaration. Yet this special vulnerability has never been given serious recognition in the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, let alone recognized as the main criterion for LDC graduation.

I therefore call on the United Nations to work seriously towards reform of the graduation rule so that no LDC that is recognized as highly vulnerable is forced to lose its LDC status.

Tuvalu wishes to commend the ongoing reforms within the United Nations but would also note with grave concern that progress is slow. We clearly need to restructure and expand the Security Council in order to properly reflect regional balance. We must take a fresh look at the membership so that the Council can properly address emerging global peace and security challenges, including climate change. We also believe that a seat should be allocated for a representative from a small island developing State in the reformed Security Council.

In the broader context of United Nations reforms, I support the Secretary-General's remarks that

> "Our changing world needs a stronger United Nations. ...
>
> "we need to be faster. ... We need to pay less attention to rhetoric, and more attention to results — to getting things done." (*A/62/PV.4, pp. 1-2*)

I could not agree more. To this end, I appeal again to the United Nations for the earliest establishment of its Joint Presence office in Tuvalu in order to facilitate better coordination of United Nations interventions.

Tuvalu believes strongly that nations have the right to self-determination. The United Nations must uphold this principle. Therefore, we believe it is time that the United Nations properly addressed the issue of Taiwan's meaningful participation in the United Nations specialized agencies. My Government strongly supports Taiwan's aspirations to meaningfully participate in the United Nations and its specialized agencies, recognizing Taiwan's own political and economic achievements and its constructive contribution to international development, trade, health, education and technology. We appeal strongly that Taiwan's aspirations to participate as a full member of specialized agencies of the United Nations be given proper and urgent attention.

Finally, our story on the achievement of the MDGs is mixed. For small island developing States like Tuvalu, addressing our sustainable development challenges is not simply poverty reduction. It is the MDGs-plus. More than ever, we need a significant increase in direct financing, technology and capacity development, as recognized under the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation, to cope with our unique island challenges.

Mr. Derrick Sikua (Solomon Islands), Vice-President, took the Chair.

My Government firmly believes that the next 12 months will be an extremely critical time in the history of the United Nations. We must act promptly and decisively to address climate change, to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and to respond to the global crises on food and energy. These issues are closely linked. We must rise to these challenges.

God bless the United Nations. Tuvalu mo te Atua.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Labour of Tuvalu for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Apisai Ielemia, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Labour of Tuvalu, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Abbas El Fassi, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Morocco

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Morocco.

Mr. Abbas El Fassi, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Morocco, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Abbas El Fassi, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Morocco, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. El Fassi (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to begin by warmly congratulating His Excellency Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann upon his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-

third session. His election honours his long-lasting personal commitment to the preservation of peace and security and, particularly, his constant efforts to encourage reconciliation in Central America. I also wish to thank Mr. Srgjan Kerim for his excellent service as President of the General Assembly at its previous session.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, for his generous and ongoing efforts to help reform our Organization, in particular those aiming to improve its working methods and its interaction with its Member States.

Twenty years ago, the fall of the Berlin Wall marked the end of a cold war era that had been characterized by ideological divisions, arms races and a weak multilateral system with inefficient mechanisms. With the end of that era came great hope and aspirations from the world's peoples, leading some to believe in the beginning of a new world order — a world order that would not only be more fair and equitable, but also distinguished by a culture of forgiveness among its nations. That new order was also meant to spread the values of democracy and human rights, giving priority to development and the better and more efficient utilization of technological advancements. At the same time, some people predicted that that new world order would restore prestige to the United Nations, allowing it to achieve more consensus on international issues.

Rather than fulfilling the expectations of a better world after the cold war, today's reality has seen an increase in regional and internal conflicts, especially on the African continent. This situation is exacerbated by a race for energy resources and a frenzied exploitation of precious minerals.

At the economic and trade levels, the launch of the World Trade Organization in 1994 in Marrakesh led to a substantial acceleration of world trade exchanges, but it did not create a fair trade system that would respond to the expectations of developing countries.

Indeed, in spite of the efforts deployed in numerous United Nations conferences, official development assistance (ODA) has significantly decreased over recent years. In fact, the assistance provided by donor countries does not meet the expectations of developing countries despite the former's commitment to increase their global annual assistance to developing countries to $50 billion by 2010.

Therefore, notwithstanding the progress achieved over previous years, Morocco, in addition to other countries, expresses its concern regarding the delay in the launching of development processes in many African countries. That delay is partly due to the complexity of the current international situation particularly marked by economic and financial crises, which have had an impact on food security and the energy needs of these countries. Those circumstances undermine years of ongoing efforts towards the development of African countries. In order to improve that situation, the Kingdom of Morocco urges the United Nations and relevant financial institutions to undertake all the arrangements necessary to stabilize the food market, to maintain social stability in developing countries and to open the market to agricultural products, taking into consideration the circumstances of the least developed countries.

The weak role of the United Nations in maintaining peace and security throughout the world during the cold war period was followed by a new phase, during which the multilateral system was characterized by the convening of several meetings and conferences focused on various global issues, as well as by the deployment of numerous peacekeeping operations, especially in Africa. As a troop-contributing country, Morocco has spared no efforts to increase its involvement in United Nations peacekeeping forces. The Kingdom is also actively promoting the enhancement of South-South cooperation by giving priority to African countries.

To parallel the changes taking place in the international arena, United Nations Member States launched major reforms centred on improving the Organization's actions, reinforcing its role and enhancing its mechanisms. Nevertheless, some weaknesses remain in coordination among the various United Nations bodies and between the Organization itself and regional organizations. That is particularly evident in the efforts to contain and prevent regional conflicts with potential spillover effects.

At this point, it is important to strengthen multilateralism in order to meet new challenges and to put in place a new order based on justice and equality. The pursuit of such an approach is not merely an option but is necessary, given the serious challenges

facing international peace and security and sustainable economic and social development.

The Middle East peace process, initiated at the Madrid Conference in 1991, was unfortunately unsuccessful in ending the conflict, which continues to see heavy daily casualties and causes millions of Palestinians to live in inhumane and tragic conditions. In this context Morocco closely follows the latest developments regarding the situation in the Middle East and encourages all initiatives aiming to bring peace to that region, with respect to international legality and to the agreements previously reached, namely the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

This last initiative undoubtedly represents a realistic solution, reflecting the true commitment of Arab countries to reach a just, comprehensive and lasting solution that would allow the Palestinian people to establish an independent State with Al-Quds as its capital and force Israel to withdraw from all occupied Arab land, a solution that would enable the people and the countries of the Middle East to live in peace, stability and security.

The Kingdom of Morocco equally expresses the necessity to respect the particular situation of Jerusalem by avoiding degrading and humiliating practices and curtailing any attempts to undermine the specificities of the Holy City in regard to culture, religion and civilization. In this regard, His Majesty King Mohammed VI, Chairman of the Al-Quds Committee, spares no effort in encouraging world leaders to help put an end to the projects taking place around the Al-Aqsa Mosque and in other parts of Jerusalem.

As far as Iraq is concerned, we closely follow progress on the ground and encourage dialogue and national reconciliation between the different ethnic, political and cultural factions in order to end the cycle of violence, to reach peace and stability, to preserve the territorial integrity of that brotherly country and to allow it to rebuild its economy.

Morocco also launched a regional initiative in June 2006 by convening an international ministerial conference on migration, development, environment and climate change. Morocco considers the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights the right occasion to appoint a United Nations special rapporteur on human rights issues. It would aim to appropriately equip the United Nations to play a leading role in ensuring that all citizens' rights are protected and that the laws and political and economic mechanisms regarding respect for human rights are harmonized in order to promote those rights.

The United Nations is based on the principles of cooperation and neighbourly relations, with regional integration and cooperation representing the best means to ensure stability, economic development and an improved collective future. Since its independence, the Kingdom of Morocco has placed the project of an Arab Maghreb Union at the top of its priorities and considered it a strategic option. Morocco is firmly committed to making the Arab Maghreb Union the herald of an era of peace and the fulfilment of the common destiny of the populations of this region.

The Kingdom of Morocco is strongly convinced about and deeply committed to overcoming all obstacles and to moving forward with regional integration into the Arab Maghreb Union. The Moroccan autonomy initiative regarding the Western Sahara, which was described by the Security Council as serious and credible, is the result of in-depth national consultations and widespread international consultations. As a result, the Security Council successfully and unanimously adopted three resolutions — 1754 (2007), 1783 (2007) and 1813 (2008) — that call upon parties to enter into true negotiations, taking into consideration the latest developments and particularly the Moroccan initiative, which launched a new dynamic in favour of a lasting solution to this conflict.

Morocco remains strongly committed to continuing those negotiations with sincerity and goodwill in order to find a final solution to that regional conflict, one that would respect the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Kingdom of Morocco and give the benefits of autonomy to the Sahara and its population. It would be a lasting, comprehensive and realistic solution to that regional conflict.

A strong, open, integrated and stable Arab Maghreb can play a key role in maintaining regional peace and security. Along the shores of the Mediterranean, it can also contribute to enhancing African integration and play an active role as an efficient and credible partner to achieve the noble goals for which the United Nations was created.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Morocco for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Abbas El Fassi, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Morocco, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. David Thompson, Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Economic Affairs and Development, Labour, Civil Service and Energy of Barbados

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Economic Affairs and Development, Labour, Civil Service and Energy of Barbados.

Mr. David Thompson, Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Economic Affairs and Development, Labour, Civil Service and Energy of Barbados was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. David Thompson, Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Economic Affairs and Development, Labour, Civil Service and Energy of Barbados, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Thompson (Barbados): It is with great pleasure that I associate the delegation of Barbados with previous speakers who have congratulated the President on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. We are particularly proud to see a fellow member of the Latin American and Caribbean group assume that high office, and I pledge to him the full support of the Barbadian delegation as he carries out his most important mandate. We wish also to commend his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Kerim, for leading the Assembly over the past year through complex discussions on a range of global challenges.

I also extend the good wishes of the Barbadian Government to the Secretary-General. We offer him our continued support as he leads the United Nations at this critical juncture in world affairs and seeks to identify meaningful pathways to progress for Member States with differing interests and national priorities.

On 15 January 2008, the citizens of Barbados, in exercise of their democratic right, which they hold sacred, voted in general elections to bring into office the Government of the Democratic Labour Party, which I have the honour to lead. It is a tribute to the good sense of the Barbadian people and to the maturity of our democracy that in our country free and fair elections take place every five years and that the transition to a new Administration is seamless, orderly and peaceful. That exemplary process affords me the opportunity to address the Assembly for the first time today as Prime Minister of Barbados. I am humbled by the confidence the Barbadian people have shown in me and am conscious of the responsibility that now falls upon my Government to respond to the overwhelming call for change that brought us to office.

Barbados is a stable, progressive small State whose high human development rating can be attributed to the emphasis successive generations have placed on the development of social capital. Our country is not endowed with abundant natural resources, and it is therefore our human resources that are our greatest asset.

Within our well-developed social democratic system, the new Barbadian Government will place the greatest priority on policies that nurture the talents and enterprise of individuals and continue to assure our people universal access to quality education, health care, adequate housing and decent working conditions, all within an environment of respect for human rights and the rule of law.

We are well aware that we are now called upon to do that in a time of unprecedented global, economic and social volatility, which is shaking the foundations of societies far larger and more powerful than our own. In these circumstances, my Government's immediate focus must be on policies that seek to address the high cost of living, which is driven largely by high energy and food prices, to reduce the levels of domestic and international debt and to stabilize the national economy while keeping it competitive. Barbadians are a resilient and resourceful people. We have weathered international storms before, and with strong and competent leadership we will do so again.

In international affairs, Barbados cherishes the reputation it holds as a successful small State whose positions are based on principle and whose actions reflect a profound respect for democratic values. In its engagement with the rest of the world, the Government, which I have the honour to lead, pledges

to uphold and carry forward the proud traditions of the father of our independence and national hero, the Right Excellent Errol Barrow.

His address to this Assembly as we joined the ranks of sovereign States remains as relevant today as it was when it was first delivered 42 years ago. His clear definition of the parameters of Barbados' foreign policy is the creed by which our Government and people continue to live. It is perhaps appropriate if I quote his words directly,

> "We will support genuine efforts at world peace, because our society is stable. We will strenuously assist in the uprooting of vestigial imperialism, because our institutions are free. We will press for the rapid economic growth of all underdeveloped countries, because we are busily engaged in building up our own.
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> "We have no quarrels to pursue and we particularly insist that we do not regard any Member State as our natural opponent. We shall not involve ourselves in sterile ideological wranglings because we are exponents, not of the diplomacy of power, but of the diplomacy of peace and prosperity. We will not regard any great Power as necessarily right in a given dispute unless we are convinced of this, yet at the same time we will not view the great Powers with perennial suspicion merely on account of their size, their wealth, or their nuclear potential. We will be friends of all, satellites of none." (*A/PV.1487, paras. 76 and 78*)

The position of the new Government of Barbados will be guided by that enduring philosophy. Because we are a small island, we will champion the issues of greatest concern to small island developing States. We will argue for the need for special recognition of their inherent vulnerabilities and for sensitive responses to the critical challenges, such as climate change and susceptibility to natural disasters, which constrain their sustainable development.

Because a one-size-fits-all mentality threatens to further marginalize us in the new international trading arrangements, we will continue to show leadership within the group of small vulnerable economies in advocacy efforts to create a regime of special and differential treatment to cater to our unique circumstances.

Because we are a middle-income developing country deemed too successful to qualify for concessionary financing but too high-risk for favourable terms on the capital markets, we will join with like-minded colleagues to lobby for adequate support mechanisms to ensure that our development process is not derailed. Because we are a Caribbean country, we will partner with our fellow Caribbean States to protect our shared patrimony — the Caribbean Sea — from over-exploitation and environmental degradation and to secure our borders from the threats of drug and arms trafficking, money-laundering and terrorism. We are fervent advocates of the notion of the Caribbean as a zone of peace, and we view with great concern any action, from whatever quarter, that seeks to reintroduce the anachronism of cold-war rivalry into our peaceful regional community of nations.

Finally, because we are a responsible member of the international community, and because we believe in the positive role that small States can play in advancing the cause of international peace and equitable social and economic development, we rededicate ourselves to the building of an international system that operates on the principle of multilateralism and that respects the sovereign equality of States and the tenets of genuine non-alignment.

Whatever semantics are used, there is little doubt that we have entered an international economic crisis of grave proportions which threatens to derail the progress of many States and to worsen the already desperate circumstances of the most vulnerable among us. The volatility of oil prices makes managing the economic affairs of our countries a daily challenge, and the escalating cost of basic foods has had immense political and social consequences throughout the world. The signals could not be clearer. Investment in renewable sources of energy such as wind, solar, geothermal and biofuels is imperative. National efforts will certainly not be sufficient, and we will therefore need to forge global partnerships, with increased investment in research and development and meaningful incentives to reverse our excessive dependence on fossil fuels.

The issue of food security is now at the centre of our national and international policy agenda. The measures proposed by United Nations agencies and those agreed upon at the High-level Conference on World Food Security, held in Rome, must now find

expression in specific programmes and projects. In addition to immediate humanitarian relief for the most severely affected countries, policies must be put in place urgently to boost production and productivity in agriculture and to correct distortions of the market that jeopardize the global supply of food. Crisis situations are often catalysts for creative national action. But the enormity of the current crisis means that for many developing countries national action will have a limited impact unless it is accompanied by a supportive framework of international cooperation and the honouring by the donor community of past commitments for increased resources for development. A successful outcome to November's Doha Review Conference on Financing for Development must include a genuine global partnership to provide the required financial resources for the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

The availability of additional financial resources is not, however, the only requirement. Meaningful changes must also be made that will allow for a greater voice, representation and effective participation of developing countries in international decision-making within the international financial institutions. The causes of the present global financial crisis are firmly rooted in the failure of the international community to reform an undemocratic and antiquated system of international economic governance that has not kept pace with the rapid growth of global interdependence. Barbados believes that those responsible for the crisis, and who also created, controlled and manipulated the global financial system for their own advantage, cannot now be trusted to heal it. Developing countries must demonstrate leadership in the search for a lasting solution to the global financial crisis and insist that any exercise to institute reforms must strictly adhere to the principles of openness, transparency and inclusiveness, with the United Nations taking the lead.

The Economic and Social Council must be empowered to play a more meaningful role in global economic decision-making, consistent with the mandate entrusted to it by the United Nations Charter. Even with the recent strengthening of the Council, its current responsibilities fall short of the role envisaged for it by the founders of this Organization. As a member of the Economic and Social Council, Barbados is ready to work with other member States to end the marginalization of the Council from the global economic policy-setting and decision-making processes.

The Economic and Social Council is by no means the only principal organ of the United Nations that is in urgent need of reform. The Security Council as it exists is not representative of the current realities and dynamics of international politics and must be reformed to reflect the situation today. We join those who have called for the start of intergovernmental negotiations on Security Council reform during the sixty-third session.

As Prime Minister of a small island developing State in a region at the epicentre of the global climate crisis, it is my hope that the current international efforts within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to respond to the scientific evidence on climate change prioritize the concerns and needs of these vulnerable developing countries, which are already being affected by the dangerous impacts of climate change. Failure to take urgent, ambitious and decisive action would be nothing short of reckless indifference.

In the wake of the destruction and devastation of the 2008 hurricane season, we in the Caribbean are acutely aware of the precarious nature of our very survival, as well as the urgency attached to action to mitigate the causes of climate change. At the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference in 2009 we must deliver an agreement that is comprehensive, ambitious and inclusive, which adopts a package of mitigation-related activities that will ensure that long-term temperature increases are stabilized well below 2 Celsius degrees above pre-industrial levels, and also provides small island developing States and other vulnerable developing countries with new, additional, predictable and easily accessible sources of funding for adaptation. Time is not on our side.

During the sixty-third session the Assembly will consider a draft resolution entitled "Towards the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea for present and future generations", which will again seek to gain international support for the initiative of States members of the Association of Caribbean States to have the Caribbean Sea recognized as a special area within the context of sustainable development. Since the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 61/197 two years ago, the States members of the Association of Caribbean States have made significant

strides in developing the institutional and legal framework for Caribbean Sea governance and have collaborated with various civil society stakeholders on measures to ensure sustainable management and conservation of our most precious natural resource. We look forward to continued assistance from the international community in helping us to achieve the objectives of that initiative.

The Government of Barbados looks forward to maintaining the excellent relations that we have enjoyed over these many years with the United Nations. We pledge to continue to uphold the principles of its Charter and will do everything to assist in maintaining an international system and community in which all nations can make their own contribution to the betterment of mankind.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Economic Affairs and Development, Labour, Civil Service and Energy of Barbados for the statement he has just made.

Mr. David Thompson, Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Economic Affairs and Development, Labour, Civil Service and Energy of Barbados, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Geir H. Haarde, Prime Minister of the Republic of Iceland

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Iceland.

Mr. Geir H. Haarde, Prime Minister of the Republic of Iceland, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Geir H. Haarde, Prime Minister of the Republic of Iceland, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Haarde (Iceland): Let me first join others in congratulating Mr. d'Escoto Brockmann on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I pledge Iceland's support and cooperation in the important work that lies ahead.

Almost all United Nations Member States recently sent athletes to compete in the Beijing Summer Olympic Games, where the world witnessed outstanding sportsmanship, in terms of both performance and conduct. The Olympics have become a global venue where there is no contradiction between the demonstration of international solidarity and positive patriotism. While recognizing that the example of such a sporting event cannot be applied directly to international relations in the political field, it could still be an inspiration as we seek ways to make our Organization more effective in dealing with the immense global challenges of the twenty-first century. The Olympics reflect the human commonality and aspirations that should be our point of departure.

Extreme poverty continues to remain an obstacle to development and security in many parts of the world. Despite considerable accomplishments in the reduction of poverty, this is still the single most daunting challenge facing mankind and the source of so many other problems with global repercussions. Experience shows that a combination of local, regional and international initiatives is usually required to eradicate the manifold causes of poverty. This includes additional resources for development cooperation.

We, the international community, must fulfil the promises we made to our most vulnerable constituents eking out an existence in extreme poverty, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. They are the ones who depend most on the solidarity of the international community. The forthcoming meeting in Doha on financing for development will test the resolve of the international community and, for its part, Iceland aims to be among the top contributors of official development assistance (ODA), having already doubled its budget for development cooperation over the past four years.

The Secretary-General has aptly referred to the interconnected challenges of soaring food costs, development and climate change. Indeed, the objective of widespread sustainable development seems ever more distant. But apathy or despair is not an option because, inevitably, the cost of inaction will rise correspondingly. Action needs to be broad-based and sustained, addressing both urgent humanitarian and long-term structural issues. Much can be done to strengthen food security. Iceland, for example, has for decades shared its experience and expertise in modern fisheries with developing coastal States, including through the work of the United Nations University Fisheries Training Programme in Reykjavik. Ninety-five per cent of the people in the world dependent on harvesting living marine resources live in developing countries. We will continue to make a small but

significant contribution towards improving their lives and thereby further the cause of sustainable development. Our goal of economic prosperity with environmental responsibility is the key to sustainable development and long-term prosperity.

The threat of climate change can be tackled only through the combined efforts of the international community. The urgency of the threat has been highlighted repeatedly by my colleagues from the small island developing States and many least-developed countries. They are the front-line States, exposed and vulnerable to the growing consequences of climate change. Ultimately, though, we will all be affected. It is in that spirit that Iceland welcomes and fully supports the Pacific Island initiative for a General Assembly resolution on security and climate change.

The urgent work started in Kyoto must be accelerated in Copenhagen next year, and carbon emissions need to be systematically reduced. The world can break the dependence on fossil fuels only by offering efficient and economical alternatives. Iceland is fortunate to have abundant hydroelectric and geothermal power and has already reached the goal of deriving about 80 per cent of its energy consumption from clean renewable sources. The resulting expertise and technology have been made available to developing States, and Iceland is proud to host the Geothermal Training Programme of the United Nations University.

Sixty years ago, Eleanor Roosevelt wisely observed that "The Charter of the United Nations is a guiding beacon along the way to the achievement of human rights and fundamental freedoms throughout the world". As we celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, her words remind us of the progress already made and the long and difficult road ahead, made more difficult by major new global challenges.

Today's world does not tolerate racial discrimination and the time has come to make sex discrimination universally unacceptable too. My Government will continue to promote gender equality internationally. We will do it both through multilateral efforts within the United Nations — most notably in the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) — and in the World Bank. Regrettably, gender equality and women's empowerment remain elusive goals throughout the world. I urge the United Nations to lead by example.

The challenges posed by globalization also offer new opportunities to revitalize the United Nations system and better equip the Organization to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century: better technology, better communications and more efficient management are all available. The United Nations is a long way from being a perfect mechanism, but its role in the international system is indisputable and indispensable. If we settle for a United Nations that sometimes appears to be an abstract objective in itself, we will never fully realize the potential of this universal gathering of nations. On the other hand, if we encourage a high level of ambition and adaptability I am convinced that the United Nations will live up to the ideals of its founders and be celebrated as a cornerstone of the international architecture on the centenary of the Charter in 2045.

One simple method of raising the profile of the United Nations, as well as awareness of its important work, is informing our citizens. I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the Government of Iceland intends to make the purpose and work of the United Nations an integral part of the curriculum at the primary and secondary levels of education in our country, in addition to the existing and more selective activities at higher levels. Iceland strongly encourages all Member States to do the same. This may prove to be an effective means of offering the multilateral ideal of the United Nations as a part of the world view imparted to future leaders and citizens around the globe.

It is perhaps an oversimplification to speak of a contest between multilateralism and unilateralism in international affairs. Those different approaches frequently overlap, but it is clear that when an effective multilateral option is available it will always be the preferred choice for most countries, especially smaller countries such as mine. This should inspire us to make the United Nations a forum that can deliver substantive results, in accordance with international law, in order to ensure that unilateral actions on issues of major significance become less likely.

Iceland has been a responsible and active Member of the United Nations since 1946 and it is now, after 62 years, seeking for the first time to serve as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, with the full support of the other four Nordic countries.

The election will take place in this Hall in three weeks' time.

Throughout the history of the United Nations the Nordic countries have been key contributors to the Organization's peacekeeping and development assistance activities and have been able to play a role that is disproportionate to their share of the global population. Above all, the Nordic countries have shown unwavering commitment to multilateral cooperation and the rule of law. If elected as a member of the Security Council, Iceland will continue in that strong tradition.

We seek the seat as a democratic State not in conflict with other countries; as a State with a history of solving its disputes peacefully; as a State that respects universal human rights; and as a State without substantial geopolitical interests and, therefore, a State that can approach issues with a certain objectivity. We see our candidature not only from a national perspective. It is also a test of whether the smaller States Members of the Organization, from all the regional groups, can have an opportunity to serve on the Council and thus reinforce its legitimacy. The election of Iceland would bolster the principle of sovereign equality and equitable representation.

Academics sometimes associate certain periods in history with countries or regions as a way of highlighting predominant characteristics or trends. It would reflect well on us here today if we had the foresight and courage to take measures in coming years that would give future historians reason to refer to the twenty-first century as the century of the United Nations.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Iceland for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Geir H. Haarde, Prime Minister of the Republic of Iceland, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Josaia V. Bainimarama, Prime Minister and Commander of the Military Forces of the Republic of the Fiji Islands

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of the Fiji Islands.

Mr. Josaia V. Bainimarama, Prime Minister and Commander of the Military Forces of the Republic of the Fiji Islands, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Josaia V. Bainimarama, Prime Minister and Commander of the Military Forces of the Republic of the Fiji Islands, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Bainimarama (Fiji): The people of Fiji warmly congratulate Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. We also convey our sincere gratitude to his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Srgjan Kerim. I am particularly happy also to acknowledge the presence of the Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands, Mr. Derrick Sikua, one of the Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly and a member of our region of the South Pacific.

This session of the General Assembly is addressing several issues of critical global interest: the global food crisis; climate change; peacekeeping; and the law of the sea. All of those issues are of great and direct importance to small island nations such as Fiji. I will first briefly touch upon some of them.

The people of Fiji have been affected in a very real, immediate, serious and tangible way by the shocks transmitted to our small nation with the dramatic escalation in global food prices, energy price rises and the downturn in the global economy. In Fiji we are using these adverse external developments as an opportunity to revamp our long-neglected agricultural sector. We have ample land resources, and we must put them to better and more productive use.

The food crisis and the need for self-reliance unfortunately run counter to the emergence of world trading rules. The principle of free trade dictates an open economy. Yet small developing economies like ours in Fiji need to protect our agriculture to ensure food security. We very much hope that international trade negotiations and multilateral and bilateral trade deals will enable us to protect agricultural development in our small, vulnerable economies. Fiji will support all concerted efforts, public and private, national and multinational, regional and subregional, that are being pursued to address the global food crisis.

On the issue of climate change, Fiji looks to, and is relying on, the leadership of the Assembly President. This is a critical issue for the very small island and atoll nations in the Pacific. While the rest of the world continues endlessly to debate the implications of climate change, in the very small islands and atolls in the Pacific the problem is very much upon us. It is now a present and very real danger. It poses a serious risk to regional stability and security.

I appeal to the international community and its system of institutions to enhance efforts to assist us to address the threats of global climate change. We need investments in adaptation measures. We need to move from rhetoric to a more pragmatic and speedy response. We call upon the agencies and our regional partners to coordinate efforts to ensure that we in the Pacific region have the capacity, both human and institutional, to deal with this new threat, especially as it is getting stronger. The observed and potential impacts on our peoples and ecosystems due to climate change are all too real and immediate. We count on the President and the Secretary-General to exercise more vigorous and active leadership on this issue of global climate change.

I will now speak briefly on peacekeeping. I convey our gratitude and appreciation to outgoing Under-Secretary-General Jean-Marie Guéhenno for his dedicated leadership at the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). He was fair and generous in implementing the reforms within DPKO and in the development of a United Nations peacekeeping doctrine that will guide future United Nations peace operations and missions. We wish Mr. Guéhenno well and assure his successor, Mr. Alain Le Roy, of our full support and cooperation.

Fiji's soldiers have a proud track record in United Nations peacekeeping operations — a record of professionalism, discipline, compassion and ability. Fiji's Military Forces have shown that their training and ethics are an asset to peacekeeping operations. We continue to work very hard to keep that exceptional record intact. Yet despite that, the relationship between Fiji and DPKO has been under strain. That is because of Fiji's military's involvement in our Government since December 2006. We are, however, encouraged by the ongoing discussion between officials of our Permanent Mission and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. It would be less than honest of me if I did not observe that undue external influence appears to have been brought to bear to exclude Fiji from participation in new peacekeeping missions. I express the hope that the opportunity will be extended to us to participate in new peacekeeping missions.

Please allow me to now address this body on Fiji's current situation and on our efforts to take the country forward. I should first like to look back, albeit briefly. Fiji became independent on 10 October 1970. Our country then was seen as having great promise and potential. Our people, with high hopes, placed their faith on our country's leaders to build a new nation that would be peaceful, stable, culturally vibrant, tolerant and prosperous. We felt then that by being part of the international family of nations Fiji could demonstrate by example the way the world should be.

For just over 15 years following independence, we achieved some progress. However, following the coups of 1987 and 2000, the rot set in. Since then, Fiji's overall political, economic and social situation has continued to deteriorate. Our people's dream of a tolerant, united and prosperous nation was replaced by a different reality — a reality characterized by political instability, economic stagnation, increasing religious and racial intolerance, ethno-nationalism and politics based on ethno-nationalism, a rise in crime, violence and corruption, increased poverty and the emigration of many of our talented, skilled and experienced citizens.

On 5 December 2006, a political transition took place in Fiji following an intervention from the Fiji Military Forces. Interim measures were put in place by the President to ensure good governance, maintain law and order and stabilize the economy. The President of Fiji subsequently appointed an interim Government, which I head. The legality of those actions has been challenged and the matter is now before the courts of Fiji.

To date, my Government, which remains in effective control of governance in Fiji, has done everything within its power to adhere to the current Constitution. We recognize that that is the supreme law of our nation. At the same time, we have also come to recognize that the very foundation on which we have sought to build our nation has been shaky and weak. Therefore, our efforts must now focus on re-laying a more solid foundation to return Fiji to sustainable democratic governance. Our island nation must be rebuilt on the solid rock-like foundations of equal

rights, social justice, democracy and good governance. We cannot and must not repeat the mistake of trying to rebuild again on the proven proverbial foundation of sand, which is washed away by the evils of self-interest, incompetence, intolerance and greed.

In January of last year, the interim Government embarked on a comprehensive examination of our political, economic, social and governance problems. We did that to identify what contributed to the abysmal record of successive Governments since May 1987, and also to find durable and just solutions. Early in that undertaking, my Government decided to reach out to the people of Fiji to ensure that they became better aware of Fiji's problems and that they all became part of the solutions going forward. We did that while being mindful of the larger issue of mandate that the events of December 2006 raised. For my part, I took the view that the interim Government must not pretend that it had the capacity or the wisdom to solve our country's problems entirely on its own.

My country, Fiji, faces deep-rooted and very fundamental problems that are both complex and structural. My Government therefore recommended to the President of Fiji that he set up a broadly representative and independent consultative body to reach out to the people of Fiji and to get them actively involved in charting the way forward for Fiji. In late 2007, the President of Fiji established a 45-member national council for building a better Fiji and officially launched what is now known as the Peoples Charter Initiative. The President invited the leaders of all major political, social, community, business and religious organizations in the country to join the national council and to contribute to formulating a people's charter for change, peace and progress. Some, in particular those organizations that remain vigorously opposed to the interim Government, chose not to accept the invitation of the President of Fiji. They wilfully persistently rejected the call to engage in constructive dialogue and to work towards a broad consensus on the way forward for Fiji.

Last year, when I addressed the Assembly, I briefly mentioned our preparations to launch the Peoples Charter Initiative. I said then that through this initiative the broad cross section of Fiji's people would be fully engaged and involved through consultation and participation in developing a comprehensive action agenda, and that that would be Fiji's own way of addressing its problems. Today, I am pleased to inform the Assembly that very considerable progress has been achieved on the Peoples Charter Initiative.

The overarching objective of the people's charter is to rebuild Fiji into a non-racial, culturally vibrant, united, well-governed and truly democratic nation — a nation that seeks progress and prosperity. The vision for rebuilding Fiji that underpins that overarching objective is guided by a number of key principles, such as creating a just and fair society; achieving unity and national identity; ensuring merit-based equality of opportunity for all citizens; transparent and accountable Government; uplifting the disadvantaged in all communities; and mainstreaming our indigenous people, the i-Taukei, in a modern and progressive Fiji.

We embarked upon the very bold programme of drafting a people's charter advisedly and for some very compelling reasons. We can ill afford to carry on with business as usual and in ways that continue to fragment and divide our nation. In that context, the process of drafting the people's charter has been a unique and unprecedented one — a nation-wide participatory and consultative process of a scale and type never before attempted in Fiji. The whole process is one of empowerment the likes of which the people of Fiji have never experienced before. Too often in national governance — and this applies to so-called democracies — it is the professional politicians who do the thinking for the people. While the cries and voices of the people are often heard, however, they are just as easily ignored by the elected representatives and so-called leaders.

From the outset, after being appointed as head of the interim Government, I have felt that it was my duty to go to the people of Fiji in the most basic and democratic sense, that is, to consult, to actively involve our people, and to put real people's democracy to work, house to house, in each settlement and village and in towns and cities right across the country. Through the People's Charter Initiative, that is what we have been doing.

There are some, both in Fiji and outside, who are cynical in that regard. I am able to understand that, and not only because such a process has never ever been tried before. It is indeed a most challenging and difficult process to undertake. Even though the people's charter process has been undertaken by the national council at arm's length from the interim Government, there are those who oppose it simply

because it is an initiative of the interim Government. What they recognize, but choose not to admit, is that the people's charter process is a real threat to their positions of vested power and privilege.

When I addressed the Assembly last year, I pleaded for the support of the international community to help us in the wake of all the political and economic turbulence that Fiji has experienced since 1987. I pleaded for support to develop a political and governance framework that is truly democratic, accountable, inclusive, equitable and non-racial, and which will seek to unify Fiji's diverse communities as a nation. I also sought constructive dialogue and engagement with the international community and with all our bilateral and multilateral development partners. I urged the international community to support us in addressing Fiji's fundamental problems.

I am asking the international community today not to focus only on the removal of a Government. That has already been done exhaustively. We have been subjected to harsh international measures, which we accepted. We have endured those through the suffering of our people. The coups of 1987 and 2000 were executed in the interests of a few and based on ethno-nationalism, racism and greed. The events of 5 December 2006 were not for any such extremist motivation.

In 2000, in quelling the civilian-led coup, as Commander of the Fiji Military Forces, I played a pivotal role in the handing of political power to a civilian Government. Through the People's Charter Initiative, I am seeking to empower the people of Fiji at large and to find just and sustainable solutions to our deep-rooted and persistent problems. I wish to assure the international community that I am personally deeply committed to breaking the cycle of coups. Equally important, I am committed to breaking the cycle of bad and unjust governance that Fiji has suffered since May 1987.

To remove the coup culture and to commit to democratic and just governance and the rule of law, it is imperative that policies that promote racial supremacy and that further the interests of self-seeking political, religious and traditional elites are removed once and for all. In good faith, I anticipated that the international community would rally behind and extend support for such goals to help move Fiji forward. Regrettably, so far that has not happened.

To the contrary, since December 2006 punitive measures have continued to be taken against Fiji. Travel sanctions continue, which are being imposed in particular by Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Those are applied to interim Government ministers, senior civil servants, military personnel and statutory board appointees. Those sanctions have had significant adverse effects on our economy, as well as on the functioning of our key State institutions, on which we rely to promote good governance and accountability. Pressure has been exerted on regional and multilateral agencies not to extend to Fiji much-needed financial, development and technical assistance.

As a result, we have not been able to make as much progress as we should have. We cannot travel and engage in discussions at important regional and international meetings abroad. That is despite the fact that Fiji has made every effort to engage in dialogue with our bilateral partners and the international community in a constructive and transparent manner. We have openly embraced and allowed various missions sent by regional and international bodies such as the Pacific Islands Forum, the European Union, the United Nations and the Commonwealth secretariat. We extended to all of them our fullest support and cooperation in terms of engagement, in arranging appointments and in making available to them whatever information they needed. That demonstrates that we are keen to engage constructively in dialogue with whoever is interested in helping move our country forward. Following the recent Pacific Islands Forum meeting in Niue, I wrote last week to the Forum Chair and indicated that the interim Fiji Government is prepared to re-engage with the Forum Joint Working Group and that we are prepared to welcome a visit, before December 2008, by the Forum's Ministerial Contact Group.

We are not able to schedule an election to return Fiji to parliamentary democracy in the early part of 2009, as earlier anticipated. We realize that that has caused concern to some of our own people in Fiji, to countries of the region and to some of our development partners. The stance taken by the international community with regard to the delay in convening the election, however, has given much ammunition to our opponents within Fiji. They have used it to vilify us despite the progress that we are making towards just and sustainable solutions to our fundamental problems.

I have already explained to Fiji's people the need to delay the election. I wish to inform our regional partners and the international community represented here today that the interim Government cannot convene an election by March 2009. That is due to work still in progress to agree on a democratic electoral system that is acceptable to the people of Fiji and that all political stakeholders can agree to through political dialogue.

We believe that the general election must be held as soon as possible. That will be done only after we have achieved broad consensus in Fiji on a non-racial and truly democratic electoral system, and agreed on a constitutional and legal way to introduce the changes. It is necessary to change our current electoral system because it is undemocratic and does not provide for free and fair elections. It contravenes the principle of equal suffrage as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. To achieve that, the President of Fiji has proposed that a political dialogue forum be convened as a mechanism independent of the national council. It is through that forum that we hope to reach consensus and introduce the reforms through legal and constitutional means. Again, I say with emphasis, the timeframe to achieve all that is not dependent upon me or the interim Government; it is the collective responsibility of all stakeholders.

In May of this year, Fiji sought assistance from the Commonwealth and the United Nations to facilitate, as a priority and with urgency, the President's proposed political dialogue forum. We had hoped that the forum, which would initially focus on electoral reform, would have been convened by now. Little progress has been made, and we are concerned about the delay. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our request to the United Nations and the Commonwealth to help us urgently in that regard.

After taking into account the feedback from our nation-wide consultations, the draft peoples charter will be amended as necessary and appropriate before it is finalized. It will then be adopted as a vision statement that identifies our core problems and the solutions recommended through the nation-wide consultation process. It is incumbent upon me and my Government to build consensus on the peoples charter as the common principles on which we should rebuild our nation. The peoples charter will present a considered way forward for Fiji. We are not obliged to abandon the enormous and important work being achieved through an extensive participatory and consultative process just because some people remain opposed and have decided not to participate. My Government's task now is to persuade those opponents to come aboard, to join and to contribute. We hope to and must achieve consensus.

At this particular juncture in the history of our nation, leadership is more about how we can seize the present historic opportunity to manage the transition from the interim Government to a truly democratic Government and nation consisting of various ethnic communities but which is one nation with its people in unity in the true spirit in which the United Nations was established.

In conclusion, I reaffirm Fiji's commitment to the United Nations and to the various United Nations conventions on human rights, the rule of law and democratic governance. We do not seek any special exemptions from our obligations under those conventions. All we seek from the United Nations is its understanding of our particular circumstances and the complex situation of Fiji. We invite the Organization to work with us to assist us to rebuild our country and move it forward.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister and Commander of the Military Forces of the Republic of the Fiji Islands for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Josaia V. Bainimarama, Prime Minister and Commander of the Military Forces of the Republic of the Fiji Islands, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Roosevelt Skerrit, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Dominica.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Dominica.

Mr. Roosevelt Skerrit, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Dominica, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Roosevelt Skerrit, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Dominica, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Skerrit (Dominica): On behalf of my delegation and the Government and the people of the Commonwealth of Dominica, I would like to

congratulate the President on his election to preside over the sixty-third session of the General Assembly. We are especially pleased that, for the first time, a national of Nicaragua is presiding over this body. Let me assure him of my delegation's fullest cooperation.

We are meeting at a time of great international uncertainty. It stems from various global crises related to the availability and affordability of food, an increasingly unstable international financial system and volatility in the supply and cost of energy. In a statement to the High-level Segment of the Economic and Social Council last July, China and the Group of 77 commented on the predicament currently facing the world. They observed, quite rightly, that it was

> "driven significantly by a severely unbalanced... economic system, made even more unbalanced by speculation; a climate ... and environmental crisis; as well as a crisis of confidence in international institutions that were created to provide policy advice and coordination on global issues."

Mr. Siles Alvarado (Bolivia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Today we endure the consequences. For small and vulnerable States in the Caribbean, such as ours, globalization continues to significantly change the dynamics of economic survival and sustainability. Our efforts to diversify our economies, adjust to global developments and stay competitive represent a formidable undertaking. As small States, we increasingly feel we have fallen off the radar screen of developed countries, which seem inconsiderate of our plight, especially in the key areas of trade and financing for development.

We keep hearing about a need for change. Indeed, around the world, change is being proffered as the panacea to all challenges and problems facing humankind. When everything else has failed, change, it would appear, becomes the only answer. As one of the youngest heads of Government who will address the General Assembly, I believe I have a duty to communicate to the world body that the word "change" is beginning to ring hollow with young people around the world.

Over the past decade, many countries have taken steps to effect change, as recommended. Sadly, in far too many instances, things have remained pretty much the same. What is really needed is meaningful change and a greater global commitment to making that change happen. When I speak of meaningful change, I mean change that goes beyond lip service and makes a noticeable difference in the lives of entire populations. Many countries cannot achieve such change alone. They need vital support from countries with advanced economies.

Four years ago, when I addressed this body, I appealed for meaningful structures to be instituted to minimize the suffering and harmful effects of natural disasters on small developing nations in particular. I am disappointed that no real progress has been made. Today, I address the Assembly against the backdrop of hundreds of fatalities and thousands of casualties from what so far has been a very active 2008 Atlantic hurricane season. Besides the loss of lives and personal injuries, natural disasters have inflicted billions of dollars worth of damage on small developing States. Most of those States are incapable of starting any short- or medium-term recovery programme on their own because of their limited resources.

Compare their plight with that of some developed countries where regions have been similarly devastated by hurricanes, earthquakes and mudslides. Those regions have been declared disaster areas and national resources have been mobilized to build and rebuild in record time, in some instances better than before. Let us compare the cases of two small countries: Haiti, in the Caribbean, less than four hours away from where we are meeting in the commercial capital of the world, and Georgia, on the Black Sea coast. Soon after the Georgia crisis, the United States Administration announced a $1 billion reconstruction package for Georgia, pledging that $500 million of that package was to be delivered by December of this year. That is commendable indeed; but what of Haiti?

That Caribbean country just south of the Florida keys is the poorest country in the western hemisphere. It is virtually a ward of the United Nations and the Organization of American States. It was devastated by the two worst hurricanes of this season — Gustav and Ike. We saw heart-wrenching images of women and children who had lost everything, caught in razor wire as they fought each other for inadequate relief supplies. What is the response of the United States Administration, the United States Congress and the United States presidential campaigns to the devastation in Haiti? What is the response of Canada and the

European Union? Where is the billion-dollar reconstruction package for the people and Government of Haiti?

We, the international community, are in Haiti. The United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti has been in the country for over three years now, and has done a commendable job to help to restore the democratic, social and economic institutions of Haiti. But we know what is needed to bring about real and meaningful change, in the quality of life of the more than 8 million people of that great country of Haiti. Yet, we shrink from committing the resources and programmes needed to achieve those results. We are providing life support to Haiti, not support for recovery and reconstruction. My question is: Why is the response to devastation in Georgia so different to our response to devastation in Haiti?

In the international financial markets, turbulence of unprecedented and horrific proportions has taken place. The last fortnight alone has broken decades-old records for corporate closures, collapses and job losses. The effects of those events will be felt equally, and perhaps even more severely, in small developing countries such as those in Latin America and the Caribbean.

I speak today as the leader of a small developing island State whose economy was effectively paralyzed due to a series of decisions taken by representatives of developed nations and multilateral agencies who seemed totally unmindful of or indifferent to the impact of such actions on small and vulnerable economies. In 2002 and 2003, the Commonwealth of Dominica suffered one of the worst economic crises in its history. That was due in part to the deteriorating fortunes of the banana industry, precipitated by a United States of America-supported challenge to the European Union banana import regime before the World Trade Organization. What might have been an academic argument for some became an issue of survival for us.

There is no country in the world that has been more dependent on banana exports than Dominica. That fact meant nothing to those who engineered the near-demise of the industry in the Caribbean members of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States as they put the WTO mechanisms to work to their benefit. The result was severe economic crisis and hardship, from which our farmers are yet to recover. I briefly recall those dire circumstances to emphasize the resolve, resilience and determination of our people, as well as what may be described as the insensitivity or indifference of others to the plight of small developing Member nations.

The meaningful change of which I speak and for which our populations yearn must be reflected in our attitudes and approaches to each other. Why speak of and proffer change if our attitude to the issue of the fundamental differences between nations — small and large, rich and poor — remains the same?

I think here of the issue of climate change. The fourth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change found that sea-level rise caused by global warming is likely to exacerbate storm surges and coastal erosion on small islands. What that means for us is severe damage to the infrastructure of human settlements, including contamination of fresh-water supplies and agricultural lands and the pollution of marine eco-systems caused by the indiscreet and unsustainable practices of others.

Why speak of change if industrialized nations, in particular, refuse to heed the warnings and show greater commitment to saving the planet and reversing climate change? Meaningful change should quicken the pace of the climate change negotiations at Poznan, Poland later this year, with the objective of providing a realistic and attainable framework for the 2009 agreement in Copenhagen.

Change ought not merely to be a slogan or an excuse for inaction. Let me reaffirm that change can be real and meaningful.

Take, for example, the response of the nations in the Caribbean and Central America to the global energy crisis. As expected, the surging price of oil has adversely impacted the economies of the small island States of the Caribbean. To address the energy crisis in the region, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela came up with an innovative initiative known as Petrocaribe in 2005. That initiative supplies fuel through a flexible payment facility to some 18 net oil-importing countries in the Caribbean and Central America. Petrocaribe also makes provisions to guarantee regional energy sovereignty by establishing an energy security arrangement through providing a reliable and timely supply of oil from Venezuela and increasing fuel storage capacity in the Caribbean.

Since the volatility in oil prices has placed national balance of payments and foreign exchange reserves at risk, the Petrocaribe pact has taken on increased economic importance as a critical lifeline for many developing economies of the Caribbean and Central America. The initiative has become the single largest source of concessionary finance to the Caribbean region, with credits to importing countries from June 2005 to December 2007 amounting to some $1.17 billion. In contrast, traditional donors and multilateral assistance during the period in question amounted to approximately one quarter of the Petrocaribe figure.

The Commonwealth of Dominica joins with other countries of our hemisphere in expressing our appreciation to Government of Venezuela for the Petrocaribe initiative. We also applaud the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for establishing in 2004 a Special Petroleum Fund for member States of the Caribbean Community, which has provided timely grant funding to meet general development objectives.

Those two initiatives by the petroleum-exporting States of Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago are shining examples of South-South cooperation and are deserving of emulation by other oil-producing States. They demonstrate that meaningful change, if earnestly pursued, can make a difference in the lives of the small and most vulnerable.

The global crisis in the availability and price of food presents yet another unprecedented challenge to developing countries. It is another area where meaningful change can make a difference.

Reports by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, which have helped to underscore the gravity of the problem. One states that "World food prices have roughly doubled over the past three years, but between April 2007 and April 2008 alone they increased by 85 per cent."

Of particular concern is the price of rice, a staple for many people in the developing world. The price of rice has trebled since September 2007, rising by some 160 per cent just within the first quarter of this year. We concur with the views of the Secretary-General about the worsening food crisis, which could push an additional 10 million people into hunger and poverty, over and above the existing 800 million.

We endorse the Secretary-General's conclusion that the crisis is a moral outrage, as well as his concern that the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is threatened by the double jeopardy of high food and fuel prices.

All of that calls for meaningful change — change in attitude and change in practice. The people we are elected to serve are committed to and long for that change. They have mandated us to make the necessary change. The question is, are we so committed? Are we ready? Are we going to agree to and effect meaningful change?

That, for many, is what the sixty-third session of the General Assembly is all about: meaningful change for the good of all, meaningful change that will make a difference, meaningful change that will transform lives, meaningful change that will replace talk with action. For many small island States, securing a new global commitment to meaningful change will be the benchmark for judging the success of the session.

Let us therefore resolve at the sixty-third session of the General Assembly to effect the meaningful change that can make a difference in the lives of our peoples. Dominica stands ready to play its part.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Dominica for the statement just made.

Mr. Roosevelt Skerrit, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Dominica, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Frederick Vaka'uta Sevele, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Tonga.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Tonga.

Mr. Frederick Vaka'uta Sevele, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Tonga, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Frederick Vaka'uta Sevele, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Tonga, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Sevele (Tonga): I would like to join previous speakers in offering Mr. d'Escoto Brockmann my warm congratulations on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly.

As this is first time that I am here to address this Assembly, whose main objectives include the promotion of democracy and economic self-reliance, I am happy to record that the Kingdom of Tonga has been undertaking some historical and fundamental economic and political reforms over the past few years.

Eight years ago, the United Nations adopted the historic Millennium Declaration, offering new hope to people living in poverty around the world. Yesterday we met to review the progress we have made to date. This midterm review provides us with yet another opportunity to assess our overall achievements, draw attention to the constraints and gaps and renew our political commitment to the achievement of the targets that we set for the year 2015.

While some progress has been made globally in regard to poverty reduction, there is yet much more work to be done. Hardship and poverty have traditionally not been an issue of serious concern in the Kingdom of Tonga, but they are now becoming one. External influences are changing people's attitudes and aspirations, straining the traditional Tongan social system in which everyone's needs were met by the community as a whole.

A recent study has found that although there are no families living in absolute poverty, there is a small proportion of the population living in hardship. Population growth, changes in lifestyle and the gradual breakdown of the traditional social and family systems have contributed to those increased hardships. But the main cause has been our lack of foresight, drive and determination to retain much of that traditional spirit of self-reliance and self-sufficiency that has served us well for centuries. That is the main challenge for Tonga today — to be more self-reliant and more self-sufficient, given the natural resources readily available to us within our own national borders.

The main theme of the general debate this year — the impact of the global food crisis on poverty and hunger in the world — is most timely. We all should look upon this crisis as an opportunity to redouble our efforts and refocus on policy actions that would help boost agricultural production in order to build greater self-reliance and self-sufficiency. Development aid can assist, but in the long term there is no substitute for a more dynamic and productive agricultural sector. Greater self-reliance is the ultimate goal for which Kingdom of Tonga strives.

Tonga's performance under the United Nations Human Development Index continues to reflect a high level of expenditure and investment in the social sectors, including health and education. The United Nations Human Development Report for 2008 ranks Tonga 55 out of a total of 177 countries. Tonga has achieved targets such as universal primary education and gender equality through the provision of free primary school education.

Tonga shares the concern that the President expressed about the impact of climate change on small island States. In his prepared remarks for his opening statement on assuming the presidency last week, he emphasized that the negotiations process on agreed long-term actions initiated in Bali

> "must be guided by a single consideration: saving those small island States that today live in danger of disappearing entirely as nations. This is the real challenge of our day and this should be our immediate concern."

And so it should be. For already, the prospect of climate refugees from some of the Pacific Island Forum countries is no longer merely a prospect but a reality, with relocations of communities already being relocated due to the rise in sea level. Urgent action must be taken now.

Last month in Niue, the leaders of the Pacific Island Forum countries endorsed, for the first time, a regional declaration on climate change as part of the Forum's communiqué. The Niue Declaration duly recognizes the serious current impact of climate change and the growing threat it poses to economic, social, cultural and environmental well-being as well as to the security of Pacific island countries. Therefore, the Pacific small island developing States will introduce a draft resolution entitled "Climate change and security" during the current session of the General Assembly. I commend the draft resolution to Member States for their consideration and support.

Tonga welcomes the resources and technical assistance that will become available through initiatives such as Japan's Cool Earth Promotion Programme, the European Union's Global Climate

Change Alliance, Australia's National Climate Adaptation Programme for the Pacific and the increase in New Zealand's financial support for climate change adaptation.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the normalization of relations between Nuku'alofa and Beijing. This milestone has reaffirmed Tonga's commitment to the observance of the One China policy, with the state of relations and economic cooperation between our two countries continuing to flourish and prosper.

Tonga welcomes the reform process and debates under way in international institutions. We share the view that the United Nations has a unique role and legitimacy and acknowledge the reforms that are occurring to strengthen the coherence of the United Nations system and, in particular, the efficacy of its development and humanitarian activities. It is vital that the United Nations contribute to developing a global framework of rules and collective action in an inclusive and democratic manner. As a member of the Commonwealth, Tonga joined others in Kampala in 2007, and most recently in London earlier this year, in expressing concern that the current architecture of international institutions does not respond adequately to the challenges facing the small island States and environmental governance.

The longstanding debate on the reform of the Security Council, now over 10 years old, remains fraught with uncertainty and an inability to reach agreement on improving fundamental aspects of the Council, including the questions of equitable representation and an increase in its membership. In our opinion, the forthcoming intergovernmental negotiations present a further opportunity for Member States to advance this debate to a successful conclusion. Tonga continues to maintain its support for Japan's proper and permanent place in any enhanced Council.

Last year from this podium, we provided details of how our Legislative Assembly approved a timetable for the implementation of reforms by 2010, leading to greater democratization of our political system.

His Majesty King George Tupou V is the driving force guiding the political reform process on which we have embarked as a nation. He holds the view that the monarchy is an instrument of change and not an obstacle to it. He has for some years, therefore, encouraged the Government to take the necessary measures to bring about a more democratic form of government, one in line with the aspirations of his people and with the changing circumstances of our globalized world.

In July this year, royal assent was granted to the Constitution and Electoral Commission Act of 2008. Its main task is to consider the constitutional and electoral implications of the resolutions of the Legislative Assembly and to draft the necessary bills for consideration and enactment.

Tonga was the first Pacific State to present its national report at the second session of the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review earlier this year. I wish to thank New Zealand for assisting in the funding of the preparation of the report and also those Member States who took the opportunity to contribute constructively to the review dialogue on the human rights situation in Tonga, as well as those who made pledges of financial and technical support.

In our globalized world, no sovereign nation can achieve its goals of progress, peace and security on its own, and that includes the Kingdom of Tonga. Constructive and active engagement in regional and international affairs through bilateral and multilateral cooperation mechanisms, with the United Nations at the centre, and greater, yet appropriate, integration into the global economy will thus continue to be the cornerstone of Tonga's foreign policy.

As a Member of the United Nations, Tonga wishes to reaffirm its commitment to continuing its active involvement in the work of the United Nations as the central body coordinating the common efforts of the family of nations to which we all belong.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Tonga for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Frederick Vaka'uta Sevele, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Tonga, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Stephenson King, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, External Affairs, Home Affairs and National Security of Saint Lucia

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime

Minister and Minister of Finance, External Affairs, Home Affairs and National Security of Saint Lucia.

Mr. Stephenson King, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, External Affairs, Home Affairs and National Security of Saint Lucia, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Stephenson King, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, External Affairs, Home Affairs and National Security of Saint Lucia, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. King (Saint Lucia): Saint Lucia is pleased to join the other Members of the United Nations family in congratulating His Excellency Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. We wish him every success as he guides these important deliberations at this most critical time. We also wish to express our appreciation to his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Srgjan Kerim, for the professional manner in which he spearheaded the work of the Assembly at its sixty-second session. In addition, we wish to acknowledge the important work undertaken by the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and his team in continuing to promote the noble principles and values of the United Nations.

We have passed the midpoint in our quest to achieve the ambitious but achievable Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the projected year, 2015. Since the adoption of that timetable in 2000, however, the global economy has experienced a number of shocks that have served to challenge our ability to achieve the MDGs within the allotted time. We and the rest of the international community must redouble our efforts to meet those challenges by addressing them with serious conviction.

As the Secretary-General has said, we face a development emergency, and emergencies require immediate action. It is therefore imperative that the international community move with the utmost urgency to enact measures to address the challenges that have emerged. Inaction or indifference will only threaten to reverse the gains already made in some areas. We must ensure that our annual reaffirmations of the right to development and the rights to food, shelter, security and peace do not ring hollow.

In spite of the numerous difficulties and challenges with which it is faced, Saint Lucia maintains its commitment to the realization of the MDGs by 2015 and will do all within its means to attain that objective, even as new difficulties arise. For that reason, Saint Lucia's social indicators are fairly reasonable and reflect the investment that has been made in human development over the years.

The reduction of poverty remains a top priority for my Government, and increased resources have been made available to programmes and institutions dedicated to the attainment of that objective.

In the education sector, universal access has already been achieved at the primary and secondary levels. Emphasis is currently being placed on improvement of quality at the primary and secondary levels, on expanded access at the tertiary level and on early-childhood education. More attention is also being given to the higher school-dropout rates among young men.

In the area of health care, reform of the health sector continues to be a priority, and significant progress continues to be made towards the achievement of free health care for all. Success continues to be recorded in respect of key indicators such as life expectancy, infant mortality and immunization coverage. Saint Lucia has achieved an even lower infant mortality rate than the 30-per-1,000 target set for the Caribbean by the World Health Organization, and we have already achieved 100 per cent immunization coverage. At the same time, the incidence of communicable diseases has been significantly reduced, although there is concern over chronic non-communicable diseases.

The AIDS pandemic continues to be the focus of our attention, and, with the assistance of regional and international partners, Saint Lucia has made important strides in addressing that challenge. Our current HIV prevalence rate is 0.12 per cent. We continue to focus on education as one of the main instruments in this fight, even as we devote increased resources to programmes geared towards early detection and the provision of free or subsidized antiretroviral drugs.

There are, however, two additional issues that are critical to development in Saint Lucia and that are not properly covered under the existing MDG framework. The first issue encompasses violence, crime and security. It is an issue that takes many forms, including

gender-based violence, which should be addressed in the MDGs. The second issue is that of migration in all its dimensions, including the impact of the emigration of skilled workers — especially teachers and nurses — on national development. It is imperative that we also consider those two issues, as they affect the achievement of the MDGs and the development of Saint Lucia and many other countries.

A particular challenge confronting us is the emergence of serious climate change and its detrimental impact on the environment. Those conditions continue to disproportionately affect small island developing States, such as Saint Lucia and the other States members of the Alliance of Small Island States, whose national territories in the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans and the Caribbean Sea are extremely vulnerable.

Increased drought on the one hand and torrential rains and flooding on the other are affecting all parts of the globe and serve as recipes for disaster and human suffering. Those conditions are being attributed more and more to the unbridled and unsustainable use of fossil fuels and the concomitant release of greenhouse gases.

A second major challenge taxing our resolve, and also associated with fossil fuel use, is the astronomical rise in energy prices. The astronomical rise in energy prices has created a new challenge as the world seeks to replace fossil fuels with cleaner and more cost-effective biofuels. The trouble with that approach is that the decreased availability of agricultural production for food has resulted in higher prices for the staple foods of people around the world, especially in developing countries, but also among the marginalized of the developed world. That trade-off — food for fuel — if not carefully balanced, could cause increased poverty, hunger and economic and social marginalization, which would serve to exacerbate already unacceptable levels of poverty and hunger.

That notwithstanding, we are heartened by the renewed efforts and improvements in the renewable energy agenda, but we lament the slow pace of their use in developed countries and the high cost of those technologies to developing countries. There must be greater liberalization and availability of new technologies in order to allow developing countries more access to development models. In the meantime, we must redouble international efforts to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases to the levels already accepted by the large majority of the members of the international community.

Last July, I joined with my fellow Caribbean Community (CARICOM) heads of Government in reviewing the impact of rising global prices, the issues surrounding energy use and climate change and the implications for the region's food and nutrition security. Among the issues arising from our deliberations, we emphasized the need for Governments to provide the necessary budgetary support and incentives for investment in agriculture, particularly at this time. And, given the importance and the development implications of climate change, we agreed to the establishment of a Task Force on Climate Change to give direction for the way forward.

It is from that perspective that Saint Lucia and many other like-minded countries have continued to emphasize the urgent need to focus on development based on sustainable economic growth as the most effective means of transforming developing countries and enabling them to reach levels where they can realize their long-term capacity for a significant enhancement of the quality of life of their people. Accordingly, Saint Lucia reiterates its strong conviction that the United Nations should regard development as the most essential tool for eradicating poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

As food prices and energy costs rise, development finance is becoming even less available. We appreciate the efforts of the countries that have met the established official development assistance target of 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product. We urge other countries in a position to do so to act quickly so that the target may not have to be shifted upwards due to increased poverty worldwide.

Of particular concern to us is the difficulty facing the lower-middle-income group of countries, to which Saint Lucia and many of the small island developing States belong. In spite of their limited resources, the members of that group have initiated prudent economic measures and have been able to make significant strides in their efforts to bring a reasonable level of economic and social benefits to their people.

However, policies that are ill-conceived and ill-advised will continue to negate our efforts and reverse some of the gains that have been made, forcing a

reclassification of our status. We look forward to meaningful progress at the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, to be held in Doha later this year, and call on our development partners to give practical expression to the numerous commitments that have been offered in the past, but that remain unrealized.

In Doha, we expect greater momentum on the question of trade and development. Many of our countries are characterized by small size and the associated vulnerabilities. While the products and services we have to offer are few, they are nevertheless the source of our livelihood. The investments in those products and services are significant for our countries, and while the pressure of competition from larger and more diversified economies may force the consideration of a wholesale shift in production focus, the economic dislocation that would result from the pursuit of such a strategy would be too overwhelming.

In addition, as small as our population may be, the youth sector is a sizable portion of our society, and they need to be given hope. The best avenue is through education and the development of small and medium-sized enterprises. Many countries have successfully developed through that route, but have failed to share their experiences with others. We therefore need the trade links to be open and fair, with greater consideration given to the very small States, so that we too can meet the hopes and aspirations of our young — and until now, patient — populations. In that respect, we call upon the United Nations Industrial Development Organization to play a more meaningful role in that endeavour.

South-South cooperation continues to be a significant component of Saint Lucia's approach to development. Saint Lucia continues to benefit from the generous economic and technical cooperation among developing countries within and outside of the Caribbean region, including Cuba, Trinidad and Tobago, Brazil and Mexico, to name a few, while we continue to develop closer cooperation with our Latin American neighbours.

We therefore applaud the establishment of the South Fund for Development and Humanitarian Assistance approved at the second South Summit, held in 2005 in Qatar, as a financing mechanism to assist developing countries in economic, social, health and educational development, and in the alleviation of hunger, poverty and the impact of natural disasters.

While developing countries have made great strides in financing their own development and the development of other countries of the South, greater cooperation in the area of technology transfer, particularly capacity-building and technical assistance, is required from the North. Capacity-building among young people is crucial to the development of the skills required to implement our commitments to achieve the MDGs.

We recognize the valuable role that both South-South and North-South cooperation play in the advancement of the development agenda. However, we know that triangular cooperation can be an equally useful and cost-effective tool for furthering our development objectives. We therefore welcome efforts in that area. Critical also to the realization of the MDGs is the delivery of aid commitments to developing countries without the burdensome conditionalities that are a typical feature of international programmes of development assistance.

The sustainable development of our sister CARICOM country of Haiti continues to be a formidable challenge faced by our region and the wider international community. It is one that requires the implementation of a long-term assistance programme that ensures that economic and social recovery take root and that the people of that country can be assured of a brighter future.

We wish therefore to applaud the Government of Haiti for its successful completion of the national growth and poverty reduction strategy focusing on improving democratic governance, security and justice, and the delivery of basic services. We call on the international community to assist Haiti in the speedy implementation of the national growth and poverty reduction strategy.

We therefore continue to call for the sustained release of pledged development resources so that the Government and the people of Haiti may continue to meaningfully, and in a sustainable manner, undertake measures to confront the numerous challenges to the development of their country.

Saint Lucia's relationship with its partners is based on a commitment to mutual respect and understanding for each other. In that vein, Saint Lucia

pays tribute to the Government and the people of the Republic of China, Taiwan, a democratic country that has continued to abide by the very principles that the United Nations holds dear, seeking to nurture and preserve human rights and development. We acknowledge the contribution that the Republic of China, Taiwan, has made to international development by its provision of substantial development assistance to developing countries in the spirit of South-South cooperation. The Government of Taiwan has provided significant cooperation assistance to Saint Lucia and other States in the areas of education, health, agriculture and tourism.

We are also heartened by recent bilateral discussions that would serve to reduce tensions in the Taiwan Straits and would result in an increase in economic cooperation, investment and transportation links. Natural disasters, epidemics and food and energy crises know no boundaries. The 23 million people in Taiwan are inextricably linked to the world scene and have the same responsibilities and obligations as others to collaborate in the prevention of global catastrophes. We hope therefore that this body will take that fact into consideration and allow them to meaningfully participate in the United Nations specialized agencies in the fight against such catastrophes.

Saint Lucia is seriously concerned about the proliferation of small arms in our part of the world. The presence of small arms in our region poses serious challenges for the security and stability of our societies. As we struggle to address that problem within our limited resources, we call on those States that are engaged in the production and trade of small arms and ammunition to enact appropriate measures to curb that illicit trade, which threatens the stability and security of our societies.

Saint Lucia remains concerned about the pace at which the matter of reform of the Security Council is proceeding. Reform of the Security Council has been on the agenda of the United Nations for much too long. We continue to support the view that it is time for the Security Council to be more democratic, in order to make it better able to deal with the increasing number and complexity of issues it must deal with and more reflective of post-1948 reality. In that respect, Saint Lucia supports the call for, at a minimum, a permanent seat on the Council for the African continent, just as other continents have such a seat.

Recent events are providing a vivid illustration of the need for reform of the Security Council. Large size, military power, economic power, or large population are not in themselves sufficient criteria for a permanent seat on the Council. Adherence to the principles enshrined in the Charter of this Organization should be paramount over all others.

In closing, Saint Lucia is a small country with resources that would fail to register in global terms. Yet, small as we are, our people have hopes, aspirations and ambitions like any other. Moreover, we hold the firm belief that we have the capacity to contribute to the world in a measured way beyond our size. We are probably best at economics, working miracles with limited resources, and literature, where our aspirations are clearly articulated — having two Nobel Laureates in these areas. We hold the view that our limited resources should be utilized and focused on improving the quality of life of our people in education, health, social services and economic opportunity. Those are our primary aims, and we believe them to be in conformity with those of this eminent Organization.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, External Affairs, Home Affairs and National Security of Saint Lucia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Stephenson King, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, External Affairs, Home Affairs and National Security of Saint Lucia, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Ahmed Tidiane Souaré, Prime Minister of the Republic of Guinea

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Guinea.

Mr. Ahmed Tidiane Souaré, Prime Minister of the Republic of Guinea, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Tidiane Souaré, Prime Minister of the Republic of Guinea, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Souaré (Guinea) (*spoke in French*): I would like to discharge my first duty by conveying to the

Assembly, on behalf of His Excellency the President of the Republic of Guinea, General Lansana Conté, whom I am honoured to represent here, brotherly greetings along with a strong message of solidarity from the people of Guinea. On this solemn occasion, I am also pleased to convey to Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann the warmest congratulations of the Guinean Government following the election of a charismatic and enlightened individual of his stature to the presidency of the Assembly. I assure him of Guinea's full and entire cooperation throughout his mandate.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my country's gratitude to his illustrious predecessor for the skill with which he handled the presidency of the sixty-second session. To the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, we once again convey our deepest appreciation for the effectiveness and vision with which he leads the work of our Organization, which is ever more in demand, because of the many challenges we face in shaping a world of peace, security, justice and prosperity for all.

With regard to international solidarity, 34 years ago the dominant groups of the world promised to implement the noble commitment made by the international community to eliminate the poverty that undermines living conditions in poor countries, in particular through the regular allocation of 0.7 per cent of the gross domestic product of industrialized countries to official development assistance.

In the euphoric wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, that promise had received only a symbolic fulfilment when the leading powers predicted, in a premature burst of triumphalism, that budgets that had been devoted until then to the arms race would, as of then, be devoted to expediting poverty eradication. However, the current configuration of our world, deeply divided as it is between rich and poor, shows multiple signs of how those promises —which, when they were made, awakened great hopes for the rapid achievement of an international world of peace, effective solidarity and shared well-being — have not been fulfilled.

With regard to international peace, in spite of the significant reduction in the current number of armed conflicts, fears remain. Indeed, military expenditures have increased significantly in recent years to proportions that hearken back to the darkest hours of the cold war, times that we had hoped were left far behind us.

The legitimate war against blind and unacceptable terrorism, waged on several fronts since 2001, is unfortunately far from reassuring. The anachronistic Israeli-Palestinian conflict persists in spite of the welcome decision to seek a negotiated settlement of that dispute. Tensions related to nuclear weapons control darken the horizon of a lasting international peace. Hegemonistic urges to control the strategic resources of the planet are obvious in various instances, raising legitimate fears for the security of those countries that are vulnerable in military terms.

When it comes to combating global hunger, the current food crisis poses an urgent and pressing challenge that demands a rapid response at the national, regional and international levels. Beyond the emergency, solidarity-based movement that has taken shape, that serious phenomenon requires a global, long-term approach from us all. To that end, the international community as a whole must promote policies and strategies geared towards returning agriculture to the heart of our national and international concerns. Our ability to satisfy the food needs of the most vulnerable peoples and to preserve socio-political stability in those countries depends on it.

With regard to poverty reduction, the results remain mixed, unfortunately. Indeed, poor countries are foundering even further, due not only to their population growth and insufficient social investments, but also to the inadequate quality and inconsistency of official development assistance. In addition, all of that must be viewed against the backdrop of the all-too-timid engagement of their development partners and of global trade conditions that place them at a disadvantage.

Currently, halfway to the 2015 deadline, official development assistance is still not being allocated at the necessary pace. In spite of demonstrating their full resolve to take control of their destiny by enacting robust measures in terms of political, economic and financial governance, poor countries must make do with the drafting of new versions of poverty reduction strategy papers that are unlikely to be implemented because of the lack of sufficient and appropriate financing.

Meanwhile, the populations of poor countries continue to increase and to grow younger. They grow impatient with the delay and slowness of their integration into globalization. Their social needs are growing and their institutional stability, prospects for democracy and likelihood of sustainable social peace are faltering. The picture is one of a vicious circle within which the leaders and peoples of poor countries are caught. They look to their partners for an extension of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative and the removal of the obstacles that impede the export of their products in order to enable their economies to escape marginalization in the global trade system.

In that context, the Guinean Government urges the implementation of the outcomes of high-level meetings with respect to the priority agenda of international development agencies. Those outcomes outline approaches and steps that could improve the living conditions of hundreds of millions of individuals, particularly in Africa, who feel the full impact of extreme poverty, illiteracy, endemic diseases, insecurity, economic marginalization and socio-political exclusion.

Elected in April 2008 in Dakar to chair the Leading Group on Solidarity Development Levies, Guinea devotes all its energies to consolidating initiatives in that field and to overseeing the design and implementation of programmes that will serve to supplement traditional financing sources. I appeal to Member States and to development partners to join us in that solidarity initiative in order to pool our collective efforts to fight poverty and achieve our common goals.

From this rostrum of international solidarity, I have the pleasure of calling on global leaders, in particular those of the wealthy and emerging countries, to increase their support for poor countries, as the community of humankind must preserve its meaning, human solidarity must show its effectiveness, and humankind must share the certain knowledge that lasting peace cannot be forged within the current asymmetrical divisions of our world.

More resolute than ever before to make proper use of the official development assistance that they will receive, the populations of poor countries are determined to emerge from the poverty afflicting them. Their young people want to make their parents and their countries proud by finding decent work at home. They do not want to get involved in clandestine immigration networks, nor do they want to deal with drug traffickers.

Encouraging results have been achieved in conflict prevention and in restoring, maintaining and building peace in the world, and in Africa in particular, in spite of the human tragedies taking place in Darfur. Our Organization deserves to be congratulated and encouraged for that. Indeed, significant progress has been achieved by Côte d'Ivoire on the path towards restoring peace and national reconciliation.

With regard to the Mano River Union, Guinea calls on the international community to continue to support the efforts of the member States of that organization in order to prevent them from relapsing into the cycle of doubt, insecurity and instability. We must also welcome the successful measures initiated and led by the Peacebuilding Commission to consolidate stability in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea-Bissau.

In the Horn of Africa and in the Western Sahara, through the perseverance of the United Nations and the stakeholders in those crises, positive signs of settlement are emerging. We urge all the stakeholders in those crises to engage in dialogue and coordination, which, if they are to be effective, require, of course, respect for the commitments that have been made.

In the Middle East, it is obvious that resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will require a regional solution based on the creation of an independent, sovereign and viable Palestinian State living side by side and in peace with Israel in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and the Quartet road map.

Moreover, Guinea reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the principle of a single and undivided China.

I would now like to address the situation in my country, which for the past two years has faced a serious economic and social crisis, triggered by a combination of internal and external factors, which I have just described. I am pleased to be able to say today that through a national patriotic upsurge, supported by the efforts of the international community, including the Economic Community of West African States, that situation is on the path towards normalization and improvement. A

Government open to all stakeholders, comprising the opposition, civil society and the two sides of industry, has been established. That Government has drawn up and is currently implementing a minimum emergency programme that should pave the way for a relaunch of the country's economic and social development process in the near future.

In spite of the pitfalls and unstable resources, the results obtained to date are encouraging. The institutional framework for governance is improving. The pace of the democratic process, in particular the preparation for legislative elections, is quickening. The independent national electoral commission is up and running. The political parties have received subsidies for election preparations. A comprehensive coordination movement involving all components of the nation is under way. The mining agreements are being revised with a view to protecting the interests of the country and, naturally, those of the investors themselves. Economic and financial governance is being strengthened, sanctioned by the adoption on 28 July 2008, by the Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund, of the conclusions of the first review of the formal programme, which should lead our country to the completion point under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative.

Working together with all actors in the nation, the Guinean Government remains firmly committed to shouldering its full share of responsibility in tackling the huge challenges posed by HIV/AIDS, drugs, lack of security, terrorism, the illicit circulation of light weapons and the structural causes underlying clandestine immigration. The eradication of poverty, maintenance of peace, institutional stability and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms lie at the heart of our national priorities.

Sixty-three years after the establishment of the United Nations, eight years after the adoption of the United Nations Millennium Declaration and at the midpoint towards the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, my country, Guinea, believes in the future of a world of greater solidarity, justice and fairness, thus safer in the context of a true and fair partnership. A reformed, revitalized United Nations, adapted to new developments, remains the appropriate forum to meet the challenges that we all face.

Before I conclude, I am pleased to report that 2008 marks the fiftieth anniversary of both our country's independence and its accession the United Nations. That gives me the opportunity to reaffirm to my country's firm commitment, alongside the rest of the international community, to achieving the noble ideals of our Organization, and to supporting and respecting all its principles and purposes, which are the foundation of a true community of destiny.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Guinea for the statement he has just made.

The Honourable M. Ahmed Tidiane Souaré, Prime Minister of the Republic of Guinea, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Jean Asselborn, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

Mr. Asselborn (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): "[We] will not enjoy development without security, we will not enjoy security without development, and we will not enjoy either without respect for human rights" (*A/59/2005, para. 17*). In this year when we celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that fundamental observation by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan continues to be as relevant as ever, and it must continue to guide our actions and those of our Organization and our Governments.

I should like briefly to recall the two high-level events that we have attended in the past few days: that on Africa's development needs and that on the Millennium Development Goals. Those meetings showed that some progress has been made — and there has been unquestionable progress that must be acknowledged: for example, we have seen a drop of 400 million in the number of people living in extreme poverty, a drop of 27 per cent in the mortality rate of children under the age of five, increased investments in education and health and progress regarding gender equality. But they also emphasized the absolute need to strengthen our efforts if we want to achieve the goals that we set ourselves by consensus in 2000, all the more since the rise in food and fuel prices and the slowing of the world economy that we have seen in recent months threaten our achievements.

Luxembourg has resolutely focussed its cooperation policy on the eradication of poverty, particularly in the least developed countries. Its actions are conceived in the spirit of sustainable development, including its social, economic and environmental aspects, with men, women and children at their core. Today, my country spends 0.92 per cent of its gross national income on official development assistance, and we expect to continue on that track in order to achieve the goal of 1 per cent in the coming years. Together with others, we shall invest our efforts to ensure that the commitments entered into 2005 at the European level are fully respected at the Doha Conference on Financing for Development.

While establishing a true development partnership must be based on shared responsibilities by donor and recipient countries, and while we are counting on strengthened action by developing countries with regard to good governance, the rule of law, capacity-building and ownership of their own development, respect by developed countries of their commitments regarding the quality and quantity of assistance is an important basis for such a partnership, particularly with respect to Africa. Nevertheless, I would like to recall that the European Union and its member States account for 55 to 60 per cent of global worldwide development assistance.

I would not like to omit a subject that was at the centre of our discussions last year and that has a major impact on the potential of countries' development: climate change. It is essential to continue along the course started in Bali and to conclude in Copenhagen a post-Kyoto regime that does not impede, but rather supports, the sustainable economic development to which the developing countries aspire. Mechanisms making an effective transfer of technology possible and appropriate financing available are, in our view, indispensable tools for the post-2012 regime, with respect to both mitigation and adaptation as part and parcel of an effective global multilateral regime, with legally binding emission reduction targets for industrialized countries and with contributions by each according to their means.

Luxembourg, for its part, decided at the beginning of the year to systematically integrate the question of adaptation to climate change into its development programmes.

However, climate change has a potential impact not only on development but on the security of countries. The initiatives of small developing Pacific island countries to refer this issue to the Assembly seems to me most timely. It favourably complements the initiative by the Maldives at the seventh session of the Human Rights Council to take up the relationship between climate change and the full enjoyment of human rights. As I have already had the opportunity to say from this rostrum, to successfully take on climate change we must tackle it in all its complexity and face it in a concerted manner. What better framework to do so than the United Nations?

Since development needs, particularly in Africa, have been at the centre of our attention this week, allow me to say a few words about some of the conflicts in Africa which impede the development of the countries they are ravaging, and in whose solution the United Nations is heavily invested — unfortunately not always with the desired results.

The conflict of Darfur is in its sixth year now, and images of people devastated by attacks, displacement, precarious life in the camps and the daily fear of fresh violence continue to haunt the media, and also our minds. International efforts and efforts of the United Nations to resolve the crisis, particularly through joint deployment with the African Union of the largest peacekeeping mission ever decided on, and the central role of mediation in the search for a political solution may continue to be in vain if the parties to the conflict, blinded by their short-term interests, continue to lack the necessary political will to commit themselves to a lasting solution.

For a solution to Darfur to be lasting, it must comprise a number of components: security, by cessation of hostilities and a return to calm on the ground; political, by the conclusion of an agreement for the sharing of power and resources; humanitarian, through effective measures to respond to immediate humanitarian needs and development needs of the population; and judicial, of course, by the end of the widespread impunity for the crimes committed in Darfur and bringing to justice the main perpetrators of the atrocities there to make a true reconciliation possible. Peace and justice should go hand in hand in Darfur, just as throughout the world. That is one of the fundamental principles that guide Luxembourg's foreign policy. We cannot, nor should we, close our eyes to the serious crimes committed in Darfur. Any

political solution that would indefinitely put off justice in Darfur would be flouting even further the rights of a population that has been suffering for too long.

The European Union and my own country are endeavouring to make their contribution with the deployment of the European Union force (EUFOR) in Chad and the Central African Republic, a force charged with protecting the refugees of Darfur as well as internally displaced persons, and allowing the humanitarian community access to those vulnerable people in a volatile security environment. EUFOR must pave the path for a United Nations force starting in the spring of next year. It is important that this transition occur under good circumstances, according to the timetable, and that the force can deploy fully, in the interest of achieving lasting stability in the subregion.

Another conflict in Africa which concerns us greatly is the one in Somalia. Somalia has been in the grips of civil war for more than a generation now, and the consequences are felt throughout the entire region of the Horn of Africa. The signing of the Djibouti agreement several weeks ago between the Transitional Government and an opposition party will perhaps open the way to a lasting stabilization of Somalia. Only by consolidating the political situation and improving security can the international community fully carry out its peacekeeping efforts in that country in the wake of the African Union, which has deployed a peacekeeping force under extremely trying circumstances. I welcome the efforts under way in the Security Council to give concrete form, when conditions permit, to the firm commitment entered into by the international community and the United Nations to help Somalia.

Much more could, indeed, be said about the situation in Africa. We are concerned over the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where fighting has recently resumed. In Zimbabwe, one must hope that all forms of intimidation and violence will now be ended so that that battered country can recover. However, more could also be said about the positive developments in Liberia and Sierra Leone, where it has been possible to put in place an integrated strategy for peacebuilding and to draw up a reliable way out of the crisis.

The sum of $700 billion has been at the centre of concerns over financial policy this week. It appears that this staggering sum has been deployed in order to repair the damage of the capitalism of the casino-like banking sector that relies on debt and speculation to achieve precarious growth. Imagine, for a moment, this sum being applied to achieve the Millennium Development Goals upheld by this Assembly in 2000 and 2005. Millions of children could survive. Millions of women would not die during or after childbirth. Much progress could be made against AIDS and malaria, or in education and training programmes for millions of poor people who live on one or two dollars a day. Take a moment to reflect on this.

I also want to mention another topic which concerns us a great deal, one where our Organization, in cooperation with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Union, should play a central role, namely, the conflicts in Georgia.

As the President of the French Republic, representing the European Union, said a few days ago from this rostrum, the European Union wants to act for peace. It is prepared to make its contribution, particularly by deploying an on-the-ground observer mission, and in the international discussions that should begin in mid-October in Geneva, with a view to a peaceful and lasting solution. Such a solution should be based on full respect for principles of independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and we condemn any action at odds with those principles. Additionally, we feel it is important to see that an independent investigation be carried out on the Georgian conflict.

It is said that war kills truth first. The European Union has committed itself to stopping the violence and getting the troops out of Georgia, which will undoubtedly help the Georgian people in both humanitarian and security terms. The real reasons for the outbreak of this conflict cannot be left to historians. Light must be shed on the situation. Therefore and most importantly, in order to avoid similar cases in the future, the raison d'être of the United Nations is to prevent the outbreak of armed conflict. If a conflict arises it is incumbent on all of us to investigate the reasons and the circumstances in order to prevent other clashes.

I also want to share what was said by the President of the European Council regarding another topic, particularly after having heard the statement last Tuesday of the President of the Islamic Republic of

Iran before the General Assembly (see A/63/PV.6). It is intolerable that Iran should call for the destruction of the State of Israel. We cannot tolerate such anti-Semitic comments, particularly from this rostrum here in our Organization.

As so often, shadows of darkness and rays of hope become intermingled when we analyse international situations, but one constant remains true: the importance of an effective multilateral system.

The United Nations could be even more effective if it were to continue its internal reform efforts. Unfortunately, there is a certain fatigue with regard to reform of the Organization. This is particularly regrettable because global challenges cannot wait. A more cohesive and effective Organization would benefit us all. Let us not hesitate to redouble our efforts to honour our reform commitments of 2005.

With regard to the reform of the Security Council, I am pleased that we are finally going to begin intergovernmental negotiations at the beginning of 2009. I hope that those negotiations will quickly achieve results. I also hope that the reformed Council will be more representative, but above all, I hope that it will perform better and be more transparent, thereby ensuring greater effectiveness and enhanced legitimacy and implementation of its decisions.

Other areas of reform agreed in 2005, such as the management of the Organization, have not yet been addressed. I therefore encourage the Secretary-General to pursue his effort to reform human resources management on the basis of the three pillars of transparency, effectiveness and the taking of responsibility.

With regard to system-wide coherence, we should pursue our efforts in the areas of operational activities, commercial practices and environmental initiatives. We must essentially move away from the fragmented system that has evolved in the course of the past 60 years of United Nations history.

In conclusion, I think it very important to once again draw the Assembly's attention to our collective decision regarding the responsibility to protect people against genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. We should continue to work on the concept of the responsibility to protect, which should be implemented in the framework of criteria and conditions set out in the final document of the 2005 Summit (resolution 60/1), so as to progressively establish an irrefutable basis upon which the international community can act in accordance with a given situation.

As a founding Member of the Organization, my country endeavours to contribute to the purposes and principles of the Charter through resolute and ongoing solidarity, through concrete involvement in efforts aimed at development, peace, security and respect for human rights, and through the determined pursuit of a multilateral approach with the United Nations at the core. It is in that same spirit that, as we did in 2001, Luxembourg has presented its candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for the period 2013 and 2014. That too is how we intend to continue to shoulder our share of responsibility in this Assembly.

Address by His Excellency Mr. Tillman Thomas, Prime Minister and Minister of National Security, Information and Legal Affairs of Grenada

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister and Minister of National Security, Information and Legal Affairs of Grenada.

Mr. Tillman Thomas, Prime Minister and Minister of National Security, Information and Legal Affairs of Grenada, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Tillman Thomas, Prime Minister and Minister of National Security, Information and Legal Affairs of Grenada, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Thomas (Grenada): I am honoured to join those who have spoken before me in congratulating the President on his election to guide the work of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly, and in commending his predecessor for his stewardship of the Assembly over the past year. I also take this opportunity to commend the Secretary-General and his staff for their continued dedication in advancing the work of the Organization.

The world has entered an era where the basis of international engagement is driven more by the trade in goods and services and the distribution of the

ownership of technology than by notions of sovereignty. As a result, small vulnerable States like Grenada are being relentlessly pressed to justify their economic viability. That, along with globalization and other challenges, has negative implications for the stability of our countries. Against that backdrop, Grenada believes that its diplomacy must undergo fundamental change, not only to satisfy domestic expectations but also to enhance our chances for success.

Just over two months ago, the people of Grenada voted overwhelmingly for new leadership and a change of direction for our nation. We humbly offer our Government as an example of peace and reconciliation in action. We bring together people committed to service notwithstanding our politically turbulent historical background. In our country, we have managed to release the distrust and divisiveness that have existed for more than 30 years in order to embrace peace and reconciliation and move our country forward. We stand as an example of hope and encouragement to those who are still fighting and cannot let go of the blame, the hatred and the anger associated with the past.

We stand today as proof that peace and reconciliation are possible, that our collective hope for those world regions where brothers fight brothers and people die needlessly is not a fanciful or vain hope: it is a valid hope that can be realized. It is a hope that has materialized in our country as we move forward together, reconciled from a divisive past to serve our people and to serve our world through our participation at the United Nations. From that platform of reconciliation, we focus on and emphasize the strategic significance of partnerships in governance. Our aim is to build strong and meaningful relationships between Government, the private sector, trade unions and other groups within civil society.

Grenada believes it must play an active role in world affairs, since our own domestic agenda coincides with many aspects of the global development dialogue, particularly as it relates to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Substantial progress has been made in many of the targeted areas. Moreover, the plans and programmes presently being pursued will ensure that social and economic development does benefit all our people.

Grenada's main strategy to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger focuses on expanding the productive sectors of the economy, particularly the agricultural sector. Emphasis will be placed on attracting young people to agriculture, stimulating the rural economy and providing for food security.

Grenada understands the importance of having a well-educated populace. We are pleased that the goal of achieving universal primary education has already been accomplished. We are now striving to ensure that each household has at least one university graduate by the year 2025.

Similarly, technical and administrative capabilities throughout the public service must be strengthened to support our developmental agenda. Grenada is convinced that we will not properly advance unless there are fundamental improvements in the development of our human resources. That is an area where international support is especially needed.

Grenada has made relatively good progress in the area of health care, especially in improving maternal health, decreasing the rate of child mortality and combating HIV/AIDS and other diseases. Our gratitude goes out to international donors and other partners associated with effective programmes in this area.

Global climate change represents a most pressing and serious challenge to the viability and the very existence of small island developing States. Climate change is not only an environmental or sustainable development issue; it is first and foremost a human issue. With the release of the fourth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, there is now scientific certainty that human activity is the main cause of global climate change. Thus, the opportunity to avoid irreversible damage to the climate system will be lost if urgent and definite actions are not immediately taken.

Small island developing States have contributed very little to the release of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Yet we are being forced to contend with the devastating effects of those emissions. We are faced with coral bleaching, sea level rise, salt water intrusion, water scarcity and increasingly severe weather events, all with very real financial and social costs for our already vulnerable economies.

The recent devastation wrought by four major hurricanes in the northern Caribbean highlights the

serious problems we face as a direct result of climate change. Our solidarity goes out to the countries hardest hit, especially Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica and the Turks and Caicos islands. We call on the international community to respond appropriately to their plight.

In that regard, Grenada takes the opportunity to strongly voice its support for the Alliance of Small Island Developing States political declaration on the urgency of responding to climate change, which is slated to be adopted on Monday, 29 September.

Members will appreciate why Grenada speaks passionately on this issue. We have had first-hand experience of the trauma, pain and economic loss associated with natural disasters. Four years ago, Hurricane Ivan literally destroyed our country. Thanks to the international community and, of course, to our resilient and resourceful people, we have since become more conscious of the imperatives of disaster preparedness and crisis management. As a consequence, we will continue to be at the forefront of activities to have this issue properly debated and appropriate action plans adopted and implemented. The leadership role we have played over the last several months, through the chairmanship of Alliance of Small Island States, is consistent with that mission.

Grenada welcomes Japan's important grant-aid programme for environment and climate change under its Cool Earth Partnership initiative.

Another issue of utmost importance to Grenada is the protection of the Caribbean Sea, an issue which has been repeatedly spoken of in this forum. Indeed, Grenada and other Caribbean Member States derive tremendous economic benefits from those pristine waters, which are threatened by transhipment of nuclear waste and other hazardous materials. Grenada reiterates the call for increased attention to be given to this serious matter with a view to having our concerns adequately reflected in a stronger General Assembly resolution.

Grenada cherishes the democratic style of governance. We therefore pledge to contribute to any multilateral dialogue to promote and enhance the corresponding principles of transparency, accountability, consensus-building and respect for institutions and individual human rights. In that respect, we intend to implement, in the short term, several critical pieces of legislation, already passed by parliament, which are designed to bring about improvement in the rule of law.

Notwithstanding the atmosphere of peace and security prevailing in Grenada, our main task is to continue to enhance the daily livelihood of our people as we strive to achieve and sustain economic growth and to restore fiscal balance and debt sustainability. That challenge is compounded by unfavourable external factors including high energy costs, escalating food prices and the worrying slowdown in major world economies and financial markets.

Grenada is determined to pursue the construction of a new economy through the implementation of strategic initiatives. As we proceed with our development, we appeal to the international community for technical assistance and other forms of support. The usual role of United Nations bodies, including the Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Health Organization, UNESCO, the United Nations Development Programme and others, will be critical in the process.

No one in the developed world can deny the value of a small country like Grenada in the expansion of democracy and the fight against terrorism. Currently, environmental issues also demand urgent action on the part of all States. Those shared goals and values reshape relations between States. These issues underscore an urgent need for new platforms to address the issue of support for the developmental needs of States. Grenada believes that the realization of a global partnership for development is of urgent importance. Serious attention should be paid to addressing the special needs of the least developed countries in the areas of trade, debt relief and the environment.

It is Grenada's hope that the sixty-third session will be filled with a spirit of camaraderie, goodwill, collaboration, equity, trust and confidence in our ability to improve the general well-being of mankind. It is our hope that the Organization's reform will take place in such a way that the perceived dominance by some will not be a standard of inflexibility, but will give way to genuine dialogue and cooperation.

I can assure the Assembly that Grenada intends to pursue its external relations based on the principle of mutual respect. Thus, we will be an active participant in multilateral debates on current issues.

Grenada maintains its staunch and unwavering stance in the fight against terrorism, illicit drugs, weapons and human trafficking. We will continue to unconditionally support all initiatives that promote and

enhance global peace and security. Grenada strongly condemns all violent acts by those who are bent on creating chaos and panic in regions around the world, and thus supports all efforts to bring the perpetrators to justice. Additionally, Grenada is committed to the full implementation of the recommendations adopted by the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force to combat money-laundering and terrorist financing.

Grenada is optimistic about the opportunities for wider and deeper engagement among Caribbean countries. We strongly believe that all countries should be allowed to develop without hindrance and undue pressure. Accordingly, Grenada calls on all countries to constructively engage Cuba at this historic juncture. Grenada is a friend both of the United States and of Cuba, and thus wishes to use this occasion to call on the former to use its diplomatic experience to assist the process of economic and social change now taking place in Cuba. Grenada contends that the stringent unilateral economic measures in place against Cuba will benefit no one and do not facilitate the world's goal of achieving a global partnership of equals.

Additionally, Grenada calls on the United Nations to continue its vital role in assisting the African continent in realizing its development objectives. In keeping with the declaration of the recently concluded high-level meeting on Africa's development (resolution 63/1), we urge the Secretary-General to use his good offices to remind world leaders of their commitments for the betterment of the African people.

Similarly, the plight of Haiti, my fellow CARICOM neighbour, must be addressed with utmost compassion and urgency. Grenada recently pledged a modest monetary donation, and is proud to be a police-contributing country with the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti. In that vein, Grenada urges the other States Members of this Organization to do likewise.

Grenada urges that we capitalize on the spirit of cooperation and collaboration to assist the poor and more vulnerable nations to become and remain viable and to actively participate in a global process that needs the input of all nations of the world, big and small. In this regard, I wish to salute the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela for considerably easing some of the financial pressure inflicted on our fragile economy by the sharp increases in oil prices. Through the Petro Caribe Initiative, several Caribbean countries are able to buy oil from Venezuela on softer terms.

Grenada is convinced that the principles upon which this great organization was founded, as articulated in its Charter, should be given full vitality. That would certainly redound to our individual and collective benefit as we seek to confront the many challenges of this modern and complex era.

Grenada commends the Secretary-General for his outstanding leadership of this Organization. Finally, Grenada once again congratulates the President on his election to facilitate and direct the debate of this sixty-third session of the General Assembly. I assure him of our full support as he guides the process.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister and Minister of National Security, Information and Legal Affairs of Grenada for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Tillman Thomas, Prime Minister and Minister of National Security, Information and Legal Affairs of Grenada, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Deputy Federal Chancellor and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Mr. Steinmeier (Germany) (*spoke in German; interpretation provided by the delegation*): I offer my congratulations to Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I wish him every success.

The United Nations mandate to establish and maintain peace and security has lost none of its urgency in 2008. The task remains. However, fulfilling it is more demanding than ever.

When the Berlin Wall fell, no one had greater hopes than we Germans not only that Germany would be reunited but that a new age of global cooperation — beyond the traditional front lines — would begin. The Iron Curtain had divided the world into two blocs and when it came to dealing with crises and conflicts, often enough, loyalty within the blocs had priority; what was needed to improve the lot of ordinary people was of secondary importance.

The end of the East-West confrontation in the early nineties seemed to mark the dawn of a new age of effective multilateralism, while the United Nations seemed to be on the threshold of a great renaissance. Disillusionment has now set in, more quickly and more profoundly than we had feared. The hoped-for peace dividend did not materialize. On the contrary, the cynical certainties of the cold war had disappeared, and they were not replaced by new ones.

The world is clearly searching for a new order, and multilateralism does not always seem to be the first choice in this quest. What we have experienced since then is the confluence of the traditional power politics of the 19th century, the legacies of the cold war and the new challenges of the 21st century.

At the same time, new players and Powers that have still to find their place in the international order are seeking to enter the global stage. It is now generally accepted that we can master the new challenges of the twenty-first century, such as climate change, scarcity of raw materials, access to food and water and the fight against epidemics, pandemics and terrorism, only if we act together. Although we know that and although it is absolutely vital that we focus on finding common solutions to the key issues of the future, time and again we are called upon to resolve conflicts that have their roots in a past that we have only seemingly put behind us.

One conflict that smouldered for some time and then escalated suddenly and violently is the crisis in Georgia, where an entire region found itself on the edge of the abyss of war and destruction and where common sense failed to prevail on all sides. The United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Union agree that the weapons must be silenced for good. We must help the suffering population without delay. That does not mean accepting the status quo; nor does it mean the calling into question of Georgia's territorial integrity.

Nevertheless, we have to work together to ensure reconstruction, the return home of the refugees and long-term security in Georgia and the entire region. The European Union is making an important contribution by sending an observer mission, which my country is leading. Together with the United Nations and the OSCE, the mission will put forward a comprehensive strategy in Geneva this October. We are aiming to pave the way towards the durable resolution of the conflict through stabilization and confidence-building in this particular region of the world, the Southern Caucasus.

The same task is even more demanding in Afghanistan, a country where the situation is still precarious. It is clear to us that, without security, Afghanistan will not, and indeed cannot, develop. Equally, however, we need economic development in order to improve the security situation and to encourage people to reject fundamentalism and terror.

We have achieved much together in recent months and years. Millions of children — many of them girls — are going to school again, while streets, bridges and hospitals are being built. The training and build-up of the Afghan police force and army are progressing. Compared to the deteriorating security situation, however, they are not progressing fast enough, especially in the present situation. Germany intends to do even more in the future.

However, we cannot afford to look at Afghanistan by itself. We need to step up our efforts to help Pakistan master the economic and social challenges it faces. Pakistan's internal stability is crucial to stability in the entire region. This will require concrete support from everyone in the international community, and my country — rest assured — will play its part.

International engagement is also still necessary in the Middle East. In the current phase of domestic uncertainty, we call upon all parties to the conflict not to ease up in their efforts to resolve the conflict. As experience has shown, to stand still in the Middle East often means to take a step backward. A new wave of terror and violent clashes would result, and neither Israel nor Palestine, nor the international community, can afford to let that happen.

Germany believes it has a particular responsibility to provide concrete assistance to improve the framework conditions. Just recently, at the Berlin Conference in Support of Palestinian Civil Security and the Rule of Law — which many of those here attended — we agreed on concrete measures to strengthen the Palestinian security sector. Those measures are already having an impact.

An Iran armed with nuclear weapons would pose a threat to security throughout the Middle East and would trigger a nuclear arms race. Therefore, Iran must put its cards on the table. We have made our offer,

which is a tangible solution. The delaying tactics of the Iranian side must not exhaust the patience of the international community. We expect a clear signal from Iran indicating its willingness to comply with the international community's demands and to build confidence. And let me make the following very clear: the Iranian President's remarks concerning Israel are irresponsible and unacceptable. In my view, the blatant anti-Semitism that he expressed in his statement once again this year (see A/63/PV.6) is outrageous and should be condemned by all of us. We must stand together on that issue.

The problems in Georgia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Middle East highlight one fact: it is more urgent than ever that we develop the foundations for a stable world order. My country stands for dialogue and the reconciliation of interests. That does not mean dialogue for the sake of discussion, without any results; nor does reconciliation of interests imply that we are prepared to abandon our own principles. We believe that it is essential to renounce violence, ensure fairness and recognize international law.

For us, that is the alternative vision to a world of fabricated opposing interests, the bloc mentality and oversimplified categories such as good and evil. East against West, North against South — that is yesterday's thinking, and it no longer has a place in today's world. In order to resolve the problems of today and tomorrow, we all need more partners, not more opponents. The twenty-first century is the first in which we can resolve problems only if we work together.

The same applies to disarmament policy. Only a partnership of shared global responsibility can achieve lasting results. The dangerous trend in which an ever-increasing number of countries strive to gain access to nuclear technology, or even to build nuclear weapons, must be stopped. My proposal to multilateralize the fuel cycle showed how those risks can at the very least be minimized. Furthermore, I call upon all States to sign the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, because its entry into force would mean a huge gain in security.

For all that, however, we must remember that more people die every day as a result of hunger than as a result of war. The pledges that we made at the turn of the millennium must not remain a mere piece of paper. The fight against hunger and poverty is also part of a global responsibility partnership. Germany will therefore step up its efforts to promote poverty reduction and global fairness. As part of those efforts, we will increase our official development assistance contributions in accordance with the plan of the European Union. In the next budget alone, we will increase development assistance by $1.2 billion.

In that connection, I would like to say something about Africa. For too long, we have perceived that part of the world only as a continent of wars and conflicts. However, I also know an Africa that has set off on the road to the future with courage and resolve. It deserves our partnership and support along that road.

At present, the headlines are dominated by the international financial crisis. Recklessness, greed and a lack of common sense among those involved has set us back years. The long-term consequences cannot be assessed yet. However, I am certain that the painful tremors on the world financial markets will accelerate the multipolarization of the international financial system. There can be no future without rules, and no single player will be able to lay down those rules. It will no longer be possible for any one country to act as if it were immune to undesirable developments. Europe, with its tried-and-tested policy of mediation and reconciliation of interests, could play a key role in this.

Together, we must now finally ensure long-overdue transparency, stability and provisions to guard against risks on the world financial markets, along with oversight. My country developed concrete proposals in that regard a few years ago. I hope that, in the face of this deep crisis, the international community will now act quickly and with resolve. We need universal rules for the international financial markets.

That does not apply only to the international financial sphere, however; clear rules, solid structures and joint action are the vital prerequisites for meeting global challenges. That is why we need a strong and effective United Nations that enjoys the confidence of the international community, has the requisite legitimacy and can be the umbrella for a global responsibility partnership.

We therefore support the process of reforming the United Nations and its organs. Security Council reform is overdue, as we are all aware. The Council's composition must reflect the realities of world politics today. Germany is prepared to shoulder greater

responsibility in that area. Less than two weeks ago, the General Assembly unanimously decided to begin the negotiations on reform soon (see decision 62/557). That important step must now be followed by others. Germany is firmly convinced that, in the twenty-first century, we need the United Nations more urgently than ever before.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Franco Frattini, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Italy.

Mr. Frattini (Italy): Today, we face the reality of an international system that is becoming more complex by the day. Globalization has created new opportunities; it has also produced uncertainty and insecurity. Sudden crises affect the fundamental sources of our sustenance and progress: food, energy and financial resources. Terrorism and nuclear proliferation threaten our security. Climate change has an impact on the future of our planet. Growing instability characterizes the energy and financial markets, widening the gap between rich and poor.

Those global challenges need a timely political response. A national response would be inadequate and illusory, for the right response can only be global and cooperative. A dramatic new vision of global governance for the twenty-first century requires rules that all nations can embrace — a new vision based on three principles: inclusiveness, effectiveness and shared responsibility.

Effective global governance means a central role for the United Nations, starting with its most representative, democratic body, the General Assembly. Effective global governance means a strong connection between the United Nations and international organizations, either universal or regional, such as the European Union and the African Union. Effective global governance requires a comprehensive and consensual reform of the United Nations system, including the Security Council. To achieve a reform of this magnitude on the foundations of strong political support, there is no alternative to general consensus.

We must immediately learn the lessons of the turmoil in the world financial markets. Promoting transparent and reliable rules in the marketplace is the only way to protect our societies from falling prey to those forces. We have to avoid squandering wealth and instead ensure that it is distributed equitably among every component of society. That is the vision that Italy will promote during its upcoming presidency of the Group of Eight (G-8). Through a broader dialogue with the emerging economies and the least developed countries, the G-8 will contribute to the shaping of a new system of global governance in which formats will be tailored to specific issues, leading to a gradual assumption of shared responsibility.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are priority challenges. They demand an urgent response, a mobilization of greater human and financial resources, new ideas and a true partnership between donor and beneficiary countries that is fully inclusive of governments, local organizations, the private sector and civil society.

Italy is strongly committed to achieving the goals of defeating hunger, strengthening health-care systems and making education accessible to all. All this is on the agenda of the upcoming Italian presidency of the G-8, and Africa will be at the centre of our attention.

The right place to address the food crisis is the United Nations, and we must equip the Organization to tackle it effectively. Italy strongly supports the roles and functions of the Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Food Programme, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and all the other agencies that help to alleviate hunger and guarantee food security. We also encourage the direct involvement of the private sector in bringing agriculture back to its rightful place at the centre of economic policies. That will require a global partnership to increase the flow of investments and know-how, enhance productivity and contribute to the development of national agro-industry; a global partnership that will make a big step towards achieving the first Millennium Development Goal: to eliminate extreme poverty and hunger and to improve the lives of the last billion, that portion of the global population still on the margins of the world economy. That is, indeed, an absolute priority.

The year 2009 will be crucial for international negotiations on climate change. Italy and the European Union are determined to reach an ambitious post-2012 agreement that includes mitigation and adaptation measures. The fight against climate change is closely connected to energy security. We need to promote greater energy cooperation at the global level. We need to promote solutions that reconcile the need for secure

supplies with sustainable energy policies, energy efficiency and clean energy technologies. We need to promote research and development of alternative fuel sources, including renewable and nuclear energy. We need to promote a comprehensive dialogue between producing and consuming countries, based on mutual trust, solidarity, dialogue and cooperation.

Interdependence is the fundamental reality that binds developed countries and emerging economies, and in its capacity as the incoming G-8 President, Italy will promote the energy dialogue and the global negotiations on climate change.

Effective multilateral cooperation built on shared responsibility is vital to tackling the main threats to our safety and security, including terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Our vigilance against terrorism must remain high and our international cooperation intense. In the next few years we should work together on a new global pact against terrorism to be enacted in 2011 on the tenth anniversary of the tragic events of 9/11.

The protection of human rights and the rule of law must underpin our action. These values are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is as relevant today as it was 60 years ago. That is why Italy has a long-standing commitment to a universal moratorium on the death penalty, with a view to its abolition. And that is also why we are working to combat impunity and to strengthen the instruments of international law, including the International Criminal Court.

The fight against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is at the centre of our international commitment. In preparation for the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, Italy is ready to do its part to strengthen the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which is of fundamental importance to preventing and countering proliferation and laying the foundations for a world free of nuclear weapons. Yet we must also maintain cooperation on the peaceful use of nuclear technology, as expressly provided for by the Treaty. We thus call upon the Iranian Government to show responsibility by promptly meeting the conditions for normal negotiations to reassure the international community and the countries of the region. Let me say very clearly that we strongly condemn the Iranian President's irresponsible remarks on the State of Israel.

Global security and regional security are very closely connected. We welcome the positive signals from the Middle East, such as the continuation of the negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, the beginning of a national dialogue among the Lebanese political forces to fully implement the Doha agreements, and the new chapter in relations between Lebanon and Syria.

In Afghanistan, the continuation of the international commitment should be accompanied by a gradual assumption of responsibility by the local authorities and forces and the participation of neighbouring countries in the stabilization process. In the Caucasus, the recent crisis indicates the need, there and elsewhere, to strengthen regional cooperation mechanisms and prevent a competitive dynamic that would lead to high costs and low benefits.

More than two hundred years ago a great Italian political philosopher Cesare Beccaria wrote, "The greatest happiness of the greatest number is the foundation of morals and legislation." True to these words, so deeply rooted in my country's democratic vocation, Italy joins in the common effort to build a world of peace, security, sustainable development and a new democratic, transparent and effective global governance.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ján Kubiš, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic.

Mr. Kubiš (Slovakia): The international community is increasingly confronted with old problems coupled with a new set of challenges of a truly global nature. And as Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said at the opening meeting, under these circumstances we face another daunting challenge — the challenge of global leadership.

We, the united nations of the world, must indeed exercise our leadership, authority and responsibility under these increasingly complex circumstances. We need to start here, at the United Nations, notably in the Security Council, but also in the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and other bodies. Cooperation among our countries and with international organizations must broaden. Real partnerships with the private sector and civil society must be pursued more vigorously.

As part of the European Union efforts, we promote coordinated measures to help developing countries increase the food supply and tackle the current crises in a sustainable manner. Furthermore, fairer international trade rules must be adopted to stimulate agriculture production, beginning in developing countries, and to allow access to foodstuffs.

This year we are at the midpoint of assessing the achievements in moving towards reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. So far, overall progress on the MDGs has been uneven, at best. Moreover, rising food prices, record energy costs, energy and pipeline security challenges, climate change, growing scarcity of water resources and the recent meltdown of financial centres that started here in the United States — all that threatens to reverse the existing advances towards the MDGs. Most, if not all, of the MDG targets can still be reached, but only if we all work towards them with doubled energy and commitment.

As a former recipient country that has successfully navigated the transition process, Slovakia itself now also provides official development assistance to help meet the MDGs, among other goals.

We are pleased that the democratization of the United Nations is among the key priorities of the year. We support democratization in the sense of increased partnership among the key United Nations bodies and of respect for one other's mandates.

Slovakia would like to place renewed emphasis on the advancement of the agreed United Nations reform measures, including the management reform of the United Nations Secretariat.

Slovakia remains convinced of the need to reform the Security Council. Based on our own recent experience from serving on the Council, we emphasize the need to make it more representative, more open and more transparent. The Council needs to be enlarged in both its categories. Slovakia supports the ambitions of Germany, Japan, Brazil and India to become permanent members of the Security Council, as well as permanent representation of Africa on the Council. The regional group of Eastern European States needs to be allocated at least one additional non-permanent seat. We thus fully support the launching of intergovernmental negotiations on Security Council reform.

This year we mark the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as cultivation of the culture of inter-religious and inter-ethnic tolerance, remain my country's priorities for action in the United Nations. Slovakia was elected a member of the Human Rights Council this year. We will promote universal respect for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind and in a fair and equal manner.

Justice is a prerequisite for peace, security and development, not a contradiction to them. Responsibility to protect should be another leading policy and principle for our joint action, both in relation to genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity and in cases of large-scale natural disasters and catastrophes. We can no longer afford another Rwanda in Darfur or elsewhere.

In this context, we would like to especially commend the African Union for its increasingly active role in putting an end to the most serious crises in Africa, especially the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur and the African Union Mission in Somalia. Here, I would like to acknowledge a continuously growing cooperation between the European Union and the United Nations, currently in some 20 operations and cases.

Nationally owned reform of the security sector, particularly in post-conflict environments, is critical to consolidating peace and stability; promoting poverty reduction, rule of law and good governance; extending legitimate State authority; and preventing countries from relapsing into conflict.

Since its membership in the Security Council, Slovakia has been actively engaged in security sector reform-related efforts as it works in support of the recommendations of the Secretary-General. We are committed to continuing our work as coordinator of the group of friends of security sector reform, as well as to further promoting regional and subregional activities in that area, following a successful workshop in South Africa and a later one in Asia and Latin America.

New challenges to global security should not divert our attention from old and more traditional threats. The world is unfortunately full of disputes, conflicts and crises. We consistently support their resolution through negotiations and peaceful means,

with a central role for the United Nations based on full respect for the principles of international law — notably those of sovereignty and territorial integrity — and we reject the use of force and unilateral action.

That is relevant to the recent developments in Georgia and in the Western Balkans, where we underline the importance of the European and transatlantic perspective for all countries as an essential element in promoting peace, stability and economic progress in the region. One lesson that we have learned is that frozen conflicts and unresolved disputes, if left to fester, tend at times to move into a dangerously hot stage, spread instability and fuel extremism. The conflict in the Middle East is telling in that respect. I should like to stress, as others have, that calls from this rostrum for the annihilation of the State of Israel are unacceptable and deplorable.

We all recognize the importance of supporting the Government of Afghanistan in its efforts to ensure stability and development in the country and to prevent Afghanistan from becoming once again a haven for terrorists. This year, Slovakia has decided to double the number of its soldiers serving in southern Afghanistan, but it is obvious that lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan will depend on solid improvements in the living conditions of Afghan citizens and in good governance.

Slovakia supports enhanced United Nations cooperation in implementing the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. To be more effective, we need an agreement on a comprehensive United Nations convention against international terrorism as soon as possible.

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery continues to pose a serious threat to international peace and security. We are in particular concerned about our inability to close the issue of the Iran nuclear programme in a way that would be considered by all to be in conformity with the non-proliferation regime. We welcome the extension of the mandate of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1540 (2004).

The tasks confronting us in the year ahead are enormous. They can be accomplished only through our strong and sustained political commitment, working through multilateral mechanisms with the United Nations in the lead and at the centre.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ali Ahmed Jama Jengeli, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Somalia.

Mr. Jengeli (Somalia): I take this opportunity to add my voice to those of numerous speakers who extended their warmest congratulations to Mr. d'Escoto Brockmann on his assumption of his responsibilities as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I am confident that this world body will benefit from his rich experience and wise guidance.

I also appreciate the Secretary-General's commitment to putting Africa's urgent needs at the top of his agenda during his term in office, and particularly his untiring efforts to assist Somalis in finding a lasting solution to their conflict.

In that connection, I propose to confine my remarks first to what I consider to be the most important issues surrounding the development needs of Africa and the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. Secondly, I will raise some of the major concerns we have about the current situation in Somalia. In recent years, a great deal has been said about Africa and its problems regarding development needs and policy implementation. I would like to dwell briefly on three particular areas: aid, the debt burden and trade.

On the issue of aid to Africa, we are mainly concerned with its quantity, relevance and quality. Of course, we support any measure, be it bilateral or multilateral, likely to increase the effectiveness, coordination and coherence of aid. With regard to the quantity of total official development assistance, most observers would agree that total aid to Africa in the coming years is not likely to increase and may even decrease. Therefore, it would be unrealistic to entertain exaggerated hopes for development through aid. Most donor countries have yet to reach the United Nations-recommended target of dedicating 0.7 per cent of their gross national income to official development assistance.

With regard to the debt burden of many countries in Africa, especially the so-called highly indebted poor countries, we believe that the international community should be doing far more than has been attempted or achieved in recent years. For one thing, the process of reducing debt should be accelerated to give credence to our recognition of the existence of an urgent crisis. We believe that, in respect of the least developed and low-

income countries, outstanding debts should be totally cancelled. We need to free resources for growth and the achievement of national development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

With regard to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, we need to take a closer look at our development policies and institutions with a view to effecting urgent reforms. Corruption needs to be controlled and better governance given a real boost and not just lip service. Priority attention to agriculture should be reinstated. Africa can and should produce more food.

We are convinced that Africa has enormous potential. We believe that its greatest potential is in the sphere of trade, and less as a recipient of aid or debt relief. In that connection, trade barriers against the agricultural products of Africa should be removed from the markets of the European Union and North America if the developed countries are really serious about aiding the less developed.

As we are all well aware, the Doha Round of negotiations is still at an impasse due to the divergence of interests between the developed and developing members of the World Trade Organization. At the heart of the impasse is the existence of huge subsidies given to farmers in the European Union and North America. Unless those subsidies are totally eliminated or substantially reduced, there is little hope for Africa and developing countries elsewhere to compete in the markets of the developed countries.

I would now like to move from major issues facing development in Africa to the specific problems and prospects of Somalia. We wish first to reaffirm that the Transitional Federal Government of the Somali Republic is fully committed to the implementation of the road map envisaged under the Somali Charter adopted in 2004, despite daunting natural and man-made challenges.

With regard to reconciliation, we wish to point out that a peace and reconciliation agreement was agreed upon and signed between the Transitional Federal Government and the opposition alliance on 19 August 2008 in Djibouti. We are now in the process of implementation, we hope without undue delays. But we are also mindful, after 18 years of conflict, that delays could occur as a result of the tactics of those who have developed a vested interest in anarchy and chaos. It is also important that the leadership, both on the Government side and on the opposition side, show resolve and leadership if the process is to succeed — and succeed it must. We are also determined to ensure that the efforts of saboteurs and spoilers will not keep hostage the whole Somali nation and peace in the region. We hope that we can count on the unambiguous support of the members of this United Nations body and the Security Council.

The situation in Somalia has been on the agenda of the Security Council for a long time. We urge the United Nations and the Security Council to play their part and not to allow opportunities to be lost through a policy of wait and see. Ultimately, history may not be very kind to the way the Security Council has been handling the Somali case when compared to the ways that it has responded to other crises in comparable situations. We urgently need the deployment of a fully fledged United Nations peacekeeping force to restore peace and stability and to create a secure environment for institution-building and socio-economic development.

Let me draw to the Assembly's attention the increasing acts of piracy and armed robbery against vessels in Somali and adjacent waters, which have resulted in the loss of both human life and property. My Government has strongly condemned those criminal acts, which violate international law and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982. Those criminal acts of piracy are unacceptable and should be put to an end. Since Somalia has no capacity to interdict vessels or patrol its long coastline to ensure the security of the sea lanes, we call on the international community to cooperate with the Transitional Federal Government in the fight against sea piracy, in conformity with the provisions of paragraph 7 of Security Council resolution 1816 (2008). We stand ready to cooperate with all Member States as well as with the United Nations in implementing that resolution.

We believe that the time has come for the world to take resolute action against the piracy off the coast of Somalia and to put an end to these criminal acts. It is unconscionable that, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, piracy on such a scale has been left unchecked for so long. We applaud the efforts of the Government of France, particularly President Sarkozy, in the fight against the piracy and armed robbery off the coast of Somalia.

Finally, I would like to touch on the dire humanitarian situation in Somalia, which is the result of conflict, drought and acts of piracy, as well as flooding in some regions. I appeal to the international community to provide more humanitarian aid to the Somali people. I wish to thank the Governments of France, Denmark, the Netherlands and Canada for escorting ships carrying humanitarian aid to Somalia. I would also like to express our profound thanks to all countries that are currently providing humanitarian aid to our country.

Permit me to conclude by emphasizing the importance of conflict prevention, conflict resolution and conflict management, not only in Somalia, but also throughout Africa and the developing world. It is hard to imagine that any meaningful socio-economic development could take place without peace or security. It is not realistic to expect countries in a state of conflict to achieve all or any of the agreed-upon Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Therefore, it is incumbent upon all developing countries, the United Nations and the Security Council to promote the conditions for effective development. Otherwise, the MDGs will appear to be an exercise in wishful thinking.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. João Bernardo de Miranda, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Angola.

Mr. Miranda (Angola) (*spoke in Portuguese; English text provided by the delegation*): I am particularly honoured to address the General Assembly on behalf of His Excellency Mr. José Eduardo dos Santos, President of the Republic of Angola.

First, I should like, on behalf of my Government, to warmly congratulate Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann on his election to preside over this organ. We wish him all success during his mandate and assure him of the support of my country.

The present session of the General Assembly is taking place at a time of serious challenges for the international community. They include the food crisis, the rise in fuel prices, unexpected climate change, the financial crisis, the escalation of cold-war rhetoric and terrorism. The global scale of those challenges and their negative effects on the lives of millions of human beings on all continents indicate that we are at a critical moment. We must overcome those challenges through a collective response, with the central role played by the United Nations. Above all, however, each State must also act individually.

With regard to the financial crisis, we must take measures that help to prevent serious effects on the global economy, especially the economies of the more vulnerable countries. Such measures must be effective and must help to reduce the negative impact on the progress that African countries have already made by implementing reforms that have enabled them to have an annual growth rate of 5 per cent.

We are also concerned at the rise in food prices. That has dealt a hard blow to the efforts to fight poverty, which affects more than 1 billion people. The rise in food prices is closely linked to climate change, which is not only causing the destruction of infrastructure and basic means of subsistence in many countries, but is also forcing millions of people into poverty.

The elimination of distorting elements in international trade is also fundamental if we are to resolve the world food crisis. The agricultural subsidies provided by the wealthiest countries to their farmers are ruining the farming production in poor countries, rendering difficult their farmers' access to international markets. The failure of the World Trade Organization negotiations during the Doha Round last July further aggravated that scenario. The collapse of those talks eliminated the chances of concluding, in the short term, a general trade agreement that would remove such subsidies and other obstacles to international trade exchanges. The Republic of Angola hopes that negotiations will resume as soon as possible and that the main actors will show the necessary flexibility to allow countries that are underprivileged as a result of the lack of a global trade agreement to avoid remaining eternally marginalized from the global economy.

Turning this extremely dangerous situation around, particularly for the countries of the South, requires that the General Assembly intensify its efforts. Our hope is that the President will steer the debate towards addressing these concerns. The Republic of Angola commits itself to contributing, within the limits of its capacity, to finding solutions to these problems that affect all States.

South-South cooperation, including triangular cooperation, has the potential to contribute to the eradication of poverty through the establishment of partnerships for sustainable development, trade,

investment, tourism, prevention and combating of drug trafficking, illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, and transnational organized crime. In that connection, Angola is honoured to chair the Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic, an effective interregional mechanism for cooperation in the areas of development, peace and security among its 24 member States in Africa and South America.

I would like to avail myself of the opportunity to assure our international partners that the Republic of Angola is motivated more than ever to assume the responsibilities that arise from membership in the institutions of the international community, those of the African continent and those of the United Nations. Our engagement and commitment will, in the meantime, continue to lie primarily in the maintenance of peace and security, the consolidation of democracy, respect for human rights and sustainable economic development, on the basis of the social laws of a market economy that will safeguard the interests and the satisfaction of the majority of the population.

Those are the principles that have guided our trajectory as a country, in particular since the end of the cold war. A coherent application of those principles is the basis for the progress that Angola is building in the political, social and economic domains. As a result, since 2002, a climate of peace prevails in the entire country, with the eradication of conflict factors and important advances in national reconciliation, emergence of a highly entrepreneurial private sector, a dynamic civil society and a free, vibrant and active press.

In the last five years, Angola has been registering high economic growth rates. During this period, the gross domestic product (GDP) grew at an estimated rate of 14.7 per cent in real terms. The non-oil sector grew at a rate of 17.4 per cent, faster than the oil sector, which reached an annual growth rate of 12.7 per cent. This growth allowed the unemployment rate, which in the mid-1990s was estimated to be at 45 per cent, to decrease to an estimated level of 22.5 per cent in 2007.

The relative weight of the extractive industry, dominated by the oil and diamond subsectors, grew at a significant rate of 61.6 per cent. Moreover, Angola saw a reduction in inflation levels from 105.6 per cent in December 2003 to 11.78 per cent in December 2007, as well as a transformation in public accounts from a deficit of 7 per cent of the GDP in 2003 to a surplus of 11.4 per cent of the GDP in 2007. These figures encourage us to be optimistic in relation to the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

On 5 September of this year, Angola added one more pillar to its democratic structure by holding legislative elections in a transparent and totally free environment. Despite the criticism and the pressure on the Angolan Government to hold the elections earlier, independently of the objective and subjective conditions prevailing at the time, the discernment of its leader, His Excellency Mr. José Eduardo dos Santos, demonstrated that the elections were held at the most appropriate moment.

With the gradual yet significant improvement in the quality of life of the people, and with fully reconciled and peaceful spirits, a climate of tolerance and political coexistence emerged into its optimal space. The elections were indeed an expression of the reaffirmation of our dignity.

All the efforts involved in the complex electoral process that led to the success of this historic feat were made with the human and material resources of the Angolan Government. We are proud to once more have given a good example of political maturity, civic discipline and full popular participation. It gives us joy to state before this Assembly that, like other peoples of the world, Africans have the capability and the ability to build their own destiny and develop participatory democracy.

Armed conflicts continue to absorb resources from both the international community and the parties involved, resources that could be better utilized for the well-being of the population in affected territories. However, for the first time in many years, Africa is experiencing a significant reduction in conflict, allowing for improved economic indicators. The progress in the peace process in Côte d'Ivoire and the consolidation of peace under way in Sierra Leone and in Liberia have brought about a new aura of hope. Furthermore, the progress made in the Democratic Republic of Congo, despite some tension in the eastern areas, is manifestly encouraging.

We hope that the efforts currently being made by the United Nations and the African Union, as well as by regional organizations, will help resolve the conflicts in Somalia and Darfur in a peaceful manner.

As Chair of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Co-operation of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Republic of Angola has given its all, together with the other countries of that region and the facilitator, to support the negotiation process with a view ending the political crisis in Zimbabwe. Angola welcomes the inter-party agreement reached in Zimbabwe and will continue to make efforts to help the parties put national interests before all personal quarrels so as to ease the return to political stability and to reverse the grim economic situation that prevails in the country. We appeal to the international community, particularly to the European Union, to support the programme aimed at overcoming the crisis, which will be drawn up by the inclusive Government resulting from the inter-party agreement. We also call for the subsequent lifting of the sanctions imposed on that country.

However, we must remain vigilant to the possibility of the eruption of new conflicts due to the political instability that exists in other countries of the continent. We must invest in preventive diplomacy and in the strengthening of rapid alert mechanisms.

In the Middle East, the latest developments seem to introduce a light at the end of the tunnel, with regard to a definitive resolution of the Palestinian and the Israeli-Arab issues. Angola encourages the parties involved to engage in a dialogue that will lead to the de facto and de jure establishment of a Palestinian State, with recognized borders, coexisting side by side with Israel.

My Government maintains its solidarity with the Common African Position and with all those who advocate the need to democratize the United Nations and to reform its system, including the expansion of the Security Council so that it reflects a fair and equitable regional representation, with all the rights inherent in membership.

I would not like to end my statement without once again conveying my regret to the General Assembly over the continuation of the embargo that the Republic of Cuba is subjected to by the United States of America. It constitutes a situation that does not comply with the rules that govern relations between States. We are in an age of peaceful coexistence among peoples and nations, and that embargo wounds the universal collective conscience of our time.

The meeting rose at 9.20 p.m.